

# Overwhelmed, Part 1: I'm Drowning

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch

Copyright © 2012, Bill Couch. All rights reserved worldwide.  
This material may be printed or copied for personal use only.

Frequently I say, "On Sunday mornings I just preach to myself and let you listen in." This is especially true of this series. I need this series of messages, because I often feel overloaded and overwhelmed. As most of you have experienced, the last month has been especially full. In the past three weeks, we have had six funerals and five Christmas Eve services in addition to all the holiday events and regular activities. As I move into 2012, I'm committed to exploring ways to align my life differently so that I'm not overwhelmed the majority of the time. I'm inviting you to join me on this journey. There are unavoidable times when we are overwhelmed with things we cannot control—crunch times at work; illness or death in the family. Those will come. But most of the time we are overwhelmed because of choices we make. This series of messages is designed to inspire us to make some different choices about how we use the precious gift of time.

No where do we read in the gospels that Jesus was ever in a hurry. Jesus had mega demands upon him from thousands of persons seeking to be blessed or healed by him every day. He knew how to respond to these demands and keep balance in his life. We find one of his key principles of balance in Mark's gospel.

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

Mark 6:30-32

How often do you say at the end of the day, "I got everything accomplished on my "to do" list and still had time to sit back and relax." For most of us seldom, if ever. My "to do" list is longer than the hours in the day. I move stuff on the list from one day to the next, then to next week and then to next month. The list keeps getting longer and longer. We always feel behind. How can we ever catch up? And yet somehow we take pride in that. Being busy is like a badge of honor in our culture. If someone says "I'm not very busy," you feel sorry for them. They must not have a life—at least one that is very important. Important people are busy people. If you are not busy, you must not be very important. Somehow our worth is tied to this obsessive need to be busy.

Technology at one time promised to solve all our busyness. We expected machines to do so much of our work that we would have more leisure time. I remember reading predictions in the early sixties that computers would reduce our work week to three days by 1985. We would be searching for things to do with all our leisure time. Just the opposite has happened. We are working more hours per week now than we did in the 60's. Technology has driven us to new levels of stress and busyness. Technology owns us. Time magazine reported that our time on the internet has grown tremendously in the last 10 years. In 2000 the average person spent 2.7 hours online—outside of their work responsibilities. In 2010 the average person spent 18 hours online. That represents over two full work days or two night's sleep. Where did that time come from? We were not given an extra 18 hours in our week. Facebook, Twitter, iTunes and YouTube did not exist 10 years ago. Think about how much time you are online each week. What have you given up in order to do that?

We impose a frenzy of activity upon our children. We are so afraid that some other kid will get the advantage if our kid is not involved in multiple activities: soccer, basketball, football, Little League, tennis, cheerleading, gymnastics, band, choir, dance lessons, scouts. Whew. Then how much of our time is spent chauffeuring our kids to all these activities? Dinner is frequently eaten in the car between activities so we can hurry home and get all the AP homework done. We feel like bad parents if our kids are not involved in 3 or 4 activities at the time. We are teaching them that their worth as a human being depends upon how busy they are.

The problem is that we never stop to evaluate the value of all these activities. Where are they leading us? Why are we doing them? It really does not matter what you are doing—just be busy and your life must mean something!

In his book, Addicted to Hurry, Kirk Byron Jones points out four negative impacts of our busy lifestyles:

1. **We no longer see clearly.** Life becomes a blur when we are in a hurry. Jones recalls a story about Billy Graham when he first started his large crusades in the fifties. He and his wife had a baby named Anne. Billy came home when she was born but had several crusades coming up and was on the road again for several months. Ruth traveled to California with her brother and his wife to see Billy. When they got to the hotel, Billy met them in the lobby. His brother-in-law was carrying Anne. Billy looked at her and said, “Who is this little girl?” He did not recognize his own daughter. When we are so busy, we no longer see clearly the things that matter. We miss the beauty of God’s creation—sunrises, moon and the stars. When was the last time you took a half hour to watch the changing colors of the sky as the sun sets? We don’t have time. We have places to go and things to do. We don’t have time to see the hurt in someone’s eye or the tear. And if we did, we would not have time to help.
2. **We no longer listen carefully.** A spouse or a child tries to get our attention. We are too busy doing something or so focused on the thoughts and plans in our heads that we just don’t hear. Then the spouse leaves us. Or the kids start acting out. We are shocked. We had no idea there was a problem. Why? Because we were too busy to listen carefully. And certainly no time to deal with problems.

3. **We no longer think deep thoughts.** When our lives are busy we have no time for reflection. We do not process the events of our lives. What does this mean? What do I need to learn from this? We don't take time to evaluate all the activities in our lives and ask: "Why am I doing this?" "What really matters to me and to God? We are just trying to survive—get it all done. We fly from one activity to the next. With no time for reflection our lives become superficial and aimless. We are rushing everywhere but going nowhere. Where do we want our lives to go in three years? How do we get there? What do we need to do? What do we need to quit doing? Those questions can only be answered when we take time to reflect.
4. **We no longer savor life.** We have no time to pause and celebrate the milestones of life. We have to hurry to the next event or activity. No time for relaxed conversations with family and friends. No time to sit and listen to God—what is he whispering to me?

Busyness is just as addictive as overeating, alcohol, pornography or drugs. I tell myself to slow down, but I can't. I may slow things down for a little while, but I can rev right back up to overwhelmed in minutes. The way we are living our lives is totally destructive. It destroys our health. It destroys our families and our friendships. It destroys our relationship with God. The Bible has a name for things that destroy life as God intended it. The Bible calls it sin. That has a punch to it. My excessive busyness is sin—it destroys my life as God intended it to be lived.

So what do we do about it? We have to treat it like sin. We can take all the time management seminars in the world and never change because our busyness is primarily a spiritual issue. First we have to call it what it is. I have to own that my

busyness is sin and then ask God to forgive me. I have to admit that I'm powerless over it and my life is out of control. I need to ask God to give me power to make different choices and to change me from the inside out. I have to be willing to repent which means to allow God to turn my life around and take me in a new direction. I will have to reflect on God's intended pattern for my life and ask him to give me strength to choose his way rather than my way.

One of the patterns that God established for life is the Sabbath. It is number 4 on his top ten list. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." The word Sabbath means to cease work. At the time God gave this command to Moses, no other culture and no other religion in the world practiced a day off every week. The importance of this had to be revealed to us by our Creator. We would have never figured this out. God has built Sabbath rest into the created order—his established pattern for life.

The Sabbath focuses us on three things: remembering, rest and renewal. By observing Sabbath worship we remember who we are. We are children of God. Our worth comes from his love, not from our accomplishments or acquisitions. Worship is pivotal to remembering your identity. God has said we need this reminder every seven days. Worship is the primary place where we are reminded who we are. Each Sunday you face a choice. What will you do? I think I'll sleep in today. I think I'll play golf or go for a walk. I think I'll read the paper or watch "Meet The Press". Nothing wrong with any of those things, but they do not remind us who we are and whose we are. If we choose those things over worship we forget who we are.

Ten years ago, most of our members attended one out of two Sundays. Now the average is one out six. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. This is not intended

to be a legalistic thing. The Sabbath is a gift. Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath.” The religious leaders had made the Sabbath a burden with all their rules about what you could and could not do. Jesus reminded us that God gave us a day off from work to remember, to rest and to renew.

God gives us the gift of a break from activity to slow down and rest. We need this once a week, but we also need to experience it on a daily basis. Jesus demonstrated this in his life. Every day he had thousands of people clamoring for his attention, blessing and healing power. He saw his disciples getting caught up in the busyness. “So many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.”

Jesus recognized that the pace was unsustainable. Rest is necessary. The Psalmist says, “He gives to his beloved rest.” (Psalm 127:2) Jesus promised, “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

The Sabbath also renews us. David said, “He leads me beside the still waters, he restores my soul.” (Psalm 23:2,3) God gave us the gift of renewing our souls. In his book, Margin, Richard Swenson talks about the importance of renewal in terms of the balance between power and load. Power is the reserve of intellectual energy, emotional energy, physical energy, spiritual energy and financial resources you have in your life. A load is something that drains our energy: unbridled work, effort, worry, activity. If we have more load than power we become overloaded—overwhelmed. We run out of power. Eventually it takes a toll on our health with strokes and heartaches. Our families fall apart.

We make deposits into our power reserves when we do things that replenish us. If we keep up our reserves above our load then we experience margin in our lives. We are doing what we need to do to keep our power reserves more than sufficient for the load we carry.

How do you get margin? You have to take away some of the load and/or increase your power. Power is increased by doing those things that replenish your energy. This is my problem. I take on new things but I never let go of anything. The load keeps increasing and squeezes out the time for renewal. We are experiencing this at church. We have three less full time staff members than we did four years ago. Yet we have maintained 95% of what we were doing and added another 20%. All of us are covering multiple responsibilities. We are thinking about adding more ministries. I'm leading us to ask the question, "If we start this, what are going to stop doing so we have time and energy for this?" We need to evaluate those things are really effective in accomplishing God's purposes for our church and let go of some of the things that are no longer effective. Many of you are facing the same challenges in your work place. Companies have been downsized but everyone is expected to produce the same level of work. Our lives are out of control. Our pace is unsustainable.

In order to experience margin, we have to prune activities that have accumulated in our lives. We need to ask God to reveal to us what activities really contribute to his purposes and which do not. This is a painful process. We will have to let go of some good things—enjoyable things.

As we begin the New Year and look for new ways to align our lives let's keep it simple. Let's admit that our busyness is sin. Let's ask for forgiveness and power to

change. Let's find some time to reflect and listen to what God thinks is important. One way to go about this is to prayerfully answer these two questions.

What are the things that replenish me that I need to increase doing in the coming year? I hope those will include spiritual replenishment. A commitment to attend worship more regularly. Spend time in prayer and Bible reading. As well as exercise and hobbies and friends.

What are the things I need to quit doing that will reduce my load. Some may be bad habits. Some may be good things, but not the best things that God has for you.

God never intended for us to live in state of being overwhelmed—drowning in activity. Jesus came that we might have life and have it to the full. What will you choose in 2012? The path of being overwhelmed which leads to death? Or God's way which leads to life? This is literally a life or death decision.