

## The Thief of Intimacy, Busyness For Parents Only

I was sitting in our living room a few days ago, with my laptop on my lap, doing what I always do “after work” — answering emails that don’t stop at 5, catching up on business.

My little girl, a real love of my life, came into the room in that beautiful way she does. She doesn’t so much walk as she skips, she glides, she dances. She walks on her tippy toes, because she is, as she says, a “for real life” princess. As she came dancing into the room, she started to say in her own sing-songy way, “Daddy, would you like to...”

At that very moment she saw me, laptop in lap, locked into my war against email. The struggle I always lose.

She cut herself off. Her dancing came to a halt. Her sing-songy voice changed to something else, something not even resembling disappointment. It was resignation, more like surrender to the rhythm of her daddy’s life, knowing the scene she had seen countless times before.

Without waiting for my response, she cut herself off mid-sentence, pivoted on her beautiful feet, and walked out. I heard her say, with her back turned to me, “Oh, you’re busy.”

As she walked out, I stared at this blasted laptop screen. Silver frame. Plastic, shiny screen. Cursor that blinks like a heartbeat. But it is not alive, this laptop. There is no heartbeat here, as there is in that delicate angel of mine.



I ran after my little love and held her in my arms. I wanted to apologize not just for being busy in that moment, but for all the hundreds of other times she must have come into the room, dancing and prancing, singing and wishing to take me with her on her imaginary flights of fancy to beautiful worlds where little girls and their dads walk through meadows populated only by butterflies, unicorns, friends, tea parties, sunshine, and hugs. It’s a beautiful pink and purple world that my daughter lives in. Far too often, she’s been there alone.

All too often, I’m home, but I am not fully there with her, because I am tending to other business.

I am a good daddy, I know I am. I know it every time her beautiful face lights up when she sees me. I work hard. I try to be a good colleague, a good son, a good friend, a good partner, a good sibling. It’s not about how much I love her (“right up to the moon and back”). It’s about the time that she has my undivided attention. It’s about the quality of time in which I am wholeheartedly present. She, my love, is always present.

And when I give in to this busyness, I am missing out. People talk about #FOMO: Fear of Missing Out. I don’t fear it; I know it. I am missing out. I’m missing out by being so busy.

We live in a culture that celebrates activity. We collapse our sense of who we are into what we do for a living. The public performance of busyness is how we demonstrate to one another that we are important.

The more people see us as tired, exhausted, over-stretched, the more they think we must be somehow... indispensable. That we *matter*.

I know I matter each time I look into the eyes of she who matters most to me. I don’t gain anything by stepping into the swamp of busyness. No one emerges from this busyness whole.

## **The Thief of Intimacy, Busyness *continued.***

We have become a thing-centered society: the accumulation of stuff is one of our favorite priorities. We define our worth through the number of tasks we fulfill. How do we become a person-centered society again?

Tasks are finite. They come at us with an endless barrage. We check them off, and more follow.

So what's the price we pay for being busy? It's not that being busy makes us more stressed, or less efficient, or less pleasant. It's that we miss out. We miss out on an extraordinary amount of time, of being present, of living in intimacy with the people we love the most. The price we pay is... intimacy.

Intimacy is what we all crave. We all want to be loved. We want to give love and receive love. We all crave for others to be with us. And that love is often the slow, patient kind. It doesn't show up on any list of tasks that have been crossed off. There are no daily memos that recognize it, no annual reports of it. It shows up in the smile of my daughter when she sees me, in the way she puts her head on my shoulder, in how long she lingers before saying goodbye.

Somewhere we read love is patient, love is kind. Real love is also often undocumented, but lived.

To love someone, truly love someone, we have to be there. We have to be there wholeheartedly. Not one eye on the laptop, one eye on our child. Not one eye on our partner, one eye on the iPhone. To love someone wholly, we have to be wholeheartedly present ourselves. Being "busy" robs us of that intimacy.

There is a whole eternity present inside each of these moments, these breaths, in which we are truly present. And there is a thief that robs the grace inside these moments. That thief is scatteredness, busyness.

Each one of these breaths is a jewel. Inside these jewels there is the promise of intimacy. Seek it. Don't lose it to the thief of busyness.

## Cruel Kindergarchy For Parents Only

We live in a child-centered age—a *kindergarchy*, if you will. If we're not careful, we assume their total well-being depends on us and anxiously strive to live up to the "myth of the perfect parent." In fact, sometimes we view our children more as products to be developed rather than as people to be enjoyed. The result can be busy, stress-filled lives filled with endless road trips between school, church, sports, tutoring, piano lessons...even the list is exhausting! Take a few moments to consider the following, if you have the time.

1. How did we come to assume that our children's failures will almost certainly be our fault for not doing enough? What cultural and spiritual forces have contributed to this?
2. What specific parental pressures have you felt raising your children? Where did these pressures come from? Do you see any negative impact?
3. How would you grade *your* parents in the way they raised you? How do you think your children would grade *you*? What might be one thing they wish was different?
4. Leslie Leyland Fields writes, "Parents with unbelieving children, friends with children in jail, the discoveries of the geneticists, and the faith heroes in Hebrews 11 are all powerful reminders of this truth: We will parent imperfectly, our children will make their own choices, and God will mysteriously and wonderfully use it all to advance his kingdom". How could this quote free us to parent with a realistic yet radiant hope?

