

SECTION 8

Participant Pages

Readings for Huddle Participants



SouthBrook
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

SECTION 8: THE SEMI-CIRCLE (NUMBERS 31-33 IN “52 WEEKS OF HUDDLES”)

When you ask someone, “How are you?” what is the most common response that you get? I hear this answer a lot:

“Busy.”

Busy. If it's not the first word I hear, chances are good it can be located in the next few minutes of conversation—at least around here.

“Busy” has become a cultural value. To say, “I’m busy,” means that I’m out there doing something, or that my life has purpose and fulfillment, or that I’m not wasting time, or that important things are happening of which I am a part. Even to say, “I’m so busy,” or, “I’m *too* busy,” can feel noble, like I’m sacrificing some of my own happiness for the greater cause of *activity*. That’s why it’s so easy to use “I’m busy” as an excuse when I don’t want to hang out with someone; it means my life is filled with acceptable reasons for why I can’t give you my time.

Busyness as a cultural value has led to some natural outcomes. Some of us have scheduled just about every second of our lives—and often our family’s lives—with some sort of activity. It has led others of us to work incredible overtime hours, to the neglect of our own health and family. Some of us take pride that we haven’t had a vacation in years; others feel guilty that we have. Some of us just say we’re busy, using the cultural capital of that word as a smokescreen to hide our lack of meaningful activity. And for still others, there is a frequent, uneasy sense that we’re not keeping up.

My wife’s cousin, Chris, is a family man. He values his kids’ ballgames and birthdays. A while back, Chris shared with me an interaction he had with his boss when Chris told him he would be using one of his allowed personal days to take a day off. His boss was annoyed. “No. I need you out selling.”

Chris said, “I need to take that day off, sir. It’s my son’s birthday.”

“No, I need you working,” his boss said, with a tone that almost suggested Chris was naïve for even asking. “Besides, *your son is not going to remember that you weren’t there anyway.*”

Chris, who is feisty and tough, was not about to back down, especially in the face of such a loveless statement. “*What?!* It’s his birthday. Of course, he’ll remember! I’m not gonna skip my son’s birthday just so I can make you a few more bucks! I’m taking a personal day.”

Fortunately, Chris took the day off and still kept his job. But notice the cultural assumption here, reinforced by his boss, against which he was fighting. *Busy first, family later.* Chris should know that, and so should his son.

“Busy” has become the new normal. The ultra-connectivity of the world today makes “now” the most obvious and sensible time to get things done. Matthew Sleeth writes, “New communication tools, nanotechnology, and human engineering will

increase the number of tasks an individual can do simultaneously. We will look back with nostalgia at the 24/7 world once these 'advances' make 48/7 a reality."

This all begs a question for us as Christ-followers, as citizens first of His heavenly kingdom rather than the western world.

Is "busy" valued by Jesus?

The value Jesus places on "busy" determines its value to us.

Now, there is no question that Jesus was at times very busy. Mark records Jesus and his disciples being so occupied sharing the message and works of the kingdom with a large crowd that they did not even have time to eat. *"Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head."* So said Jesus to a would-be follower about his costly, on-the-go lifestyle.

On the other hand, Jesus was also often found trying to escape the crowds and retreat to solitary places to pray to His Heavenly Father. Another time, Jesus left the country just so he could get away with his disciples. Jesus was often found breaking the man-made rules of the religious establishment that were bogging down the weekly day of rest, the Sabbath, reclaiming it as a day of rest and re-creation for God's people.

Jesus' words and works, therefore, suggest that busy for busy's sake is not valued by Him. Rather there is something far more important, far more valuable, to Jesus. Something with which Jesus would replace mere busyness as a kingdom virtue. It's something God has designed us to be and brings Him glory. It can be found in Jesus' words to His disciples in John 15. Take a look:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."
—John 15:1-8 (ESV)

Do you see what Jesus wants us to be? **Fruitful.** Bearers of fruit. Fruit is mentioned six times over the span of seven verses, starting at verse 2.

What is the "fruit" Jesus is talking about here? Jesus is using a gardening analogy. As we know, fruit is the product of the inner work done by a plant that enables that plant (in this case a grapevine) to multiply and increase.

For us, "Good fruit" is the ongoing external evidence of the inner transformation done in us by the Holy Spirit. Greg Laurie writes, "Essentially, [bearing fruit] is becoming

like Jesus. Spiritual fruit will show itself in our lives as a change in our character and outlook.”¹

Paul writes, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*” —Galatians 5:22-23

These are fruit. They are the character of Jesus. And that fruit results not only in our own lives being changed but also in a kingdom-sized impact on the world around us. Do others see Jesus’ character increasing in us as they watch us?

I think of my friend, Jeffrey.

Jeffrey works in a high demand sales job, where he has to make lots of cold calls, many of which are rejected. Advancement and income depend directly on his success in selling. Crises often occur at unexpected times that he must deal with in a relatively short timeframe. In short, it’s a stressful environment. Jeffrey used to find much of his identity in his performance at work, which led to workaholism, and anger.

However, as the Holy Spirit has produced fruit in Jeffrey’s life, things have changed at work. **Faithfulness** and **patience** to do the job right made Jeffrey an asset to his company. He was promoted to leading a team. His growing understanding that his identity is in Christ, not in his job performance, has led to **peace** and **joy** in the chaos. His **kindness** and **gentleness** toward his team created a pocket of grace and camaraderie in an otherwise cut-throat environment. His team even began outperforming other teams.

When a vindictive ex-co-worker stole information from the company resulting in Jeffrey losing multiple clients, Jeffrey responded with Christ’s **self-control** and **love**. He forgave the perpetrator, refusing to allow bitterness into his own life or his place in the company. The moral **goodness** at work in him kept him from seeking revenge or name-calling, which would have just exacerbated the corruption. This has all been noticed by his co-workers, as God does *His* work through Jeffrey. Jeffrey invited one of those co-workers to join his huddle. Seeing Christ clearly at work in Jeffrey, his co-worker said yes, and is now actively engaged in discipleship.

The fruit is multiplying in and through Jeffrey. That is what God is after. That is what is far more important to God than mere busyness.

Can we be busy and fruitful? Certainly. Often times being fruitful requires that we are busy with things. But we can also be very busy without seeing much kingdom fruit at all. Moreover, to be fruitful requires something besides busyness; something, in fact, of which busyness can be the greatest enemy. Something without which there can be NO lasting kingdom fruit. Something that is mentioned seven times in the verses above, starting at verse 4. Do you see it? It’s there. And it’s essential.

It’s this: To be fruitful, we must **abide**.

¹ Laurie, Greg, How do we bear spiritual fruit?
jesus.org/following-jesus/fruit-of-the-spirit/how-do-we-bear-spiritual-fruit.html

THE RHYTHM OF LIFE

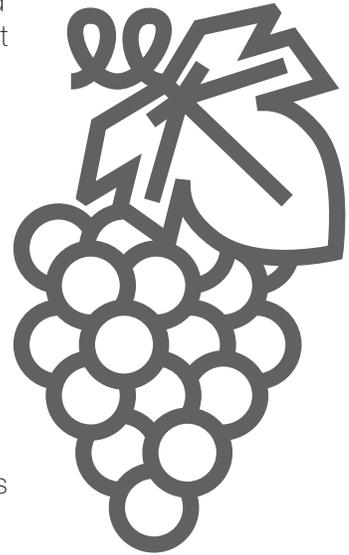
To abide is to rest in something, to dwell, to be connected to something in a dependent way, passing time there.

When I think of the word abide, I think of the word *abode*. You may have heard someone refer to their home as “my humble abode.” It’s a dwelling, a place where you **rest** and are restored.

“Abiding in Jesus,” is resting in Jesus, and choosing to stay connected to Him, as though He’s our source of life—which He is. If we don’t learn to do this, we won’t be fruitful.

In John 15, Jesus is describing the rhythmic, yearly cycle of a grapevine:

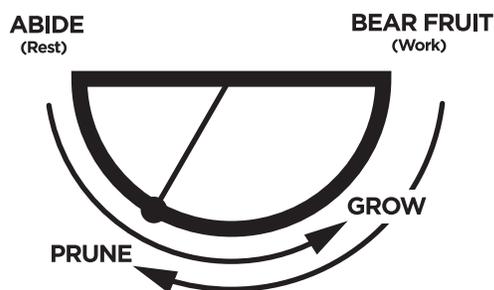
1. In the winter season, a branch has ceased from work and is simply **abiding**, resting in the vine, which is the 2-3 foot trunk-like stalk sticking out of the ground. It’s a time of non-productivity.
2. When the spring season comes, that little branch **grows** and **grows**.
3. The growing branch then has a season of productivity. It **bears fruit**, which is harvested.
4. After bearing fruit, the gardener **prunes** that branch all the way back to the vine again, to prepare for the next season. The branch is again at rest, abiding in the vine.



Jesus is saying, “Do you see how this grapevine works? That’s how I’ve designed **you** to work, too. The rhythm of the grapevine’s life is the rhythm I want for *your* life.”

To illustrate this truth, here is one of our tools for the “S” of Solitude: **The Semi-Circle.**²

A semi-circle is the shape made by a pendulum as it swings back and forth in rhythm. “**Abide** in me,” Jesus says. As we do this, we will **grow**. Jesus will bring about **fruit** in our lives as we go forth to work, live and act. After bearing fruit, our activity needs to be **pruned** back. And then it’s time again to **abide**.



This is the rhythm of life to which God calls us. We need to be intentional about creating rhythms of abiding and rest—**daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms.**

To abide in Jesus is to create space in our lives for God to pour into us. It’s intentionally positioning ourselves to receive His grace, like a dog laying on the air conditioning vent.

² The semi-circle is a tool created by Mike Breen and 3DM.

DAILY RHYTHMS

Abiding is both spiritual and physical. We need to make time every day to seek God through Solitude and Scripture, as well as knowing when to call it quits on work and activity for the day so we can eat, sleep, think and relax.

Even in the business world, where busyness often reigns supreme, wise people are seeing the value of creating daily shutdown time. In his book *Essentialism*, Greg McKeown writes about a practice of Jeff Weiner, the CEO of LinkedIn. “Jeff schedules up to two hours of blank space on his calendar every day. At first, it felt like an indulgence, a waste of time. But eventually, he found it to be his single most valuable productivity tool. He sees it as the primary way he can ensure *he* is in charge of his own day, instead of being at the mercy of it.” (Page 69)

What other daily rhythms of abiding and rest are people creating, to make space for God?

- “Jeffrey,” the guy I mentioned earlier, wakes up every morning, works out, and spends time praying and reading Scripture.
- Some people turn on praise music or listen to sermons on their commute to work.
- Personally, I get distracted and fall asleep when I pray sitting down, so I go on prayer walks or runs most mornings before 7.
- Some families read a children's Bible and pray with their kids at breakfast time or before bed.
- Disengaging from social media after a certain hour including work emails is a way some people “prune” back at the end of the day to experience rest.

My friend Erik mentioned a wrestler he knew, who got so used to fasting from food that even in the off-season he would just forget to eat. “Isn't that weird?” he asked. “We literally need food to survive. How can he just forget? And yet that's how a lot of us lead our spiritual lives. We need God more than we need food. Or air. And yet sometimes we go days without seeking Him.”

We need to create space to rest, physically and spiritually. Everyday.

WEEKLY RHYTHMS

One of the definitions of Solitude is “to cease from work.”

Imagine God spoke directly to you and said this:

“(Name), let me ask you a question. If you could have a day on which you could escape the rat race and focus on nothing more than rest, relaxation, refreshment and/or rejuvenation for yourself [and your family] what would you do with that day? And by ‘day,’ I mean a solid 24-hour period. Go hiking? Hang out with people? Take a nap? Play a board game? Stare at the wall? Paint toy soldiers? Oh, and no working. In fact, eliminate from your day anything that *feels* like work. If cleaning feels like work, do it on a different day. You can enjoy Me, enjoy your family, enjoy

yourself, and do good for others,³ but that's it. It should feel like a big load off. Do you have your day in mind? Okay, here's the deal: **I want you to take a day like this every week.** In fact, it's so important to me that you get a day like this every week that I'm making it a *command*.

What if God commanded you to take a day off like this every week?

You may see where I'm going with this.

He *did*.

In fact, it made the Top 10 List, right up there with, "Don't murder people," and "Don't sleep with your neighbor's spouse". "Remember the Sabbath" is the 4th commandment.⁴ The Sabbath is a day of ceasing from work. It's His gift to us. And God said to "keep it holy." That means to keep it as a day "set apart" for rest and refreshment in God.

God wants us to pattern our lives after His creation order. He did His work in six days, and rested on the seventh—so did He design us to function. We will be most productive when we pattern our lives in this way. Matthew Sleeth writes, "God designed us to spend one day a week at the speed of stop."

Why did He command Israel to "remember" the Sabbath? Because He knew they would forget. They would go back to what they knew. In Egypt, as slaves, they had a 10-day week. The meaning of their lives was bricks, bricks and more bricks—ten days a week. God had to completely reprogram how they thought about busyness, productivity, and rest.

So it is for us. Our culture of "busy" will often tell us it's impractical and unrealistic to expect a full day of rest. It's off our radar as a culture. Sleeth says, "If we wish to have a weekly day of rest, it will no longer happen as a societal default. It will happen only as a result of a conscious choice."⁵

In order to live this command, we must be *intentional*.⁶

Matthew Sleeth again writes, "When we rest, our blood pressure falls and levels of stress hormones such as cortisol decline. If we treat our bodies as temples, we must allow time for physical, mental, and spiritual recovery from the labors of our week."⁷

Sabbath is key. There are other weekly rhythms that are important, too. Weekend church services, date nights with our significant others, family dinners, huddles, play groups, Bible Studies and hang out times can also be important weekly rhythms.

³ In Matthew 12, Jesus was criticized for healing on the Sabbath because "healing is work". But Jesus said it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Why? Because when we serve others, they get to share in the rest too. Rest for the sick is healing. Rest for the hungry is food. So serving others is great to do on the Sabbath also.

⁴ Exodus 20:8

⁵ Sleeth, Matthew, 24/6, p. 25

⁶ I'm of the mindset that which particular 24-hour period we choose for rest isn't as crucial as actually doing it. I don't see God, in the New Testament, insisting that believers living in different cultural contexts maintain the exact same Sabbath day that the Israelites have had for centuries. Some Christ-followers see it differently. Regardless, that day of rest is crucial.

⁷ 24/6 p 77

SEASONAL

In Luke 3, we read about the baptism of Jesus. Having been immersed in water, the Holy Spirit, the One Jesus would lean into to empower His earthly ministry, descended on Him, and remained with Him. He was now ready to go!

However, Jesus didn't go straight into the work of preaching, healing, and driving out demons. The Spirit led Him into the desert. He began His earthly ministry by spending forty days alone with His Heavenly Father, choosing to abide in God's truth over Satan's lies. This was an act of *seasonal abiding*. He came out of this time *empowered*.⁸

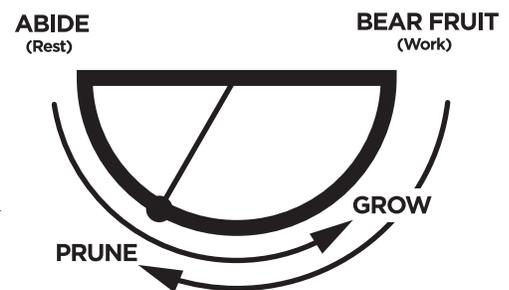
In the Old Testament, we read of God *commanding* the Israelites to cease their work at certain times of the year and celebrate with various feasts and events. These joyous celebrations gave them rest from their work and reminded them of their identity as His people. These were "seasonal" rhythms of *abiding*.

These examples give us a pattern to follow. To create seasonal rhythms, we need to get the yearly calendar out and say, "When will we carve out extended times to stop, rest and enjoy God's goodness?"

Our lives can start feeling "laggy," like a computer that hasn't been restarted in a while. An extended time of rest can act as a reset button. It refreshes us. It restores vision to our lives.

- Some people find the holidays are great for taking some extra time off, celebrating Jesus' life and birth, and enjoying time with family.
- Some need to get to a beach and stare at the ocean for a while, or head to a lake and ski.
- Others need to get to the mountains and get their hands and feet dirty in God's creation.
- For others, like Leroy Jethro Gibbs⁹, taking a week to refinish a boat would be bliss for the soul.

Creating *simple* and *sustainable* daily, weekly and seasonal rhythms will keep us abiding in Christ and give us the rest we need. Our "pendulums" will swing back and forth in a healthy way when they become anchor points in our week, around which we plan. It won't be perfect. This is life. But these rhythms we create will act as safeguards that keep us attached to the vine, and our lives bearing fruit.

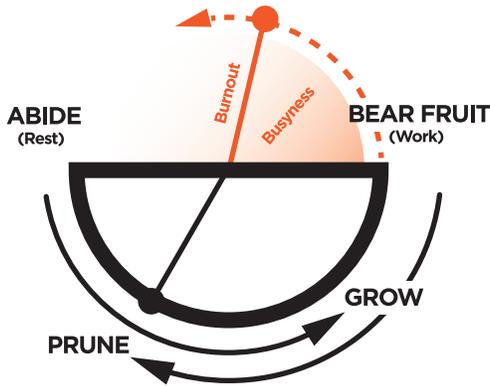


⁸ Luke 4:14

⁹ A character on the hit show NCIS

WHEN WE DON'T ABIDE

Unfortunately, even once we know these things, sometimes we choose not to rest and abide. We let busy take over. Instead of swinging back to rest in rhythm, our pendulums just keep swinging up the “work” side. This is where “Fruitful” becomes mere “busyness.” And if we keep going, we’ll really start to fray. Eventually, we’ll experience burnout. We’ll go and go until we *crash* back to rest—because we have to or we’ll fall over. And then we do it again. And again. And the hamster wheel keeps spinning.



Why do we do this? Why *don't* we rest and abide in Christ, when we know it's so necessary? There are lots of reasons, and they're all rooted in lies our culture throws at our feet like firecrackers to keep our legs moving. Here are three lies that keep us from abiding, and the truths that will help us get busy stopping.

1. “It all depends on me.”

Some of us believe if we stop, things will fall apart. At the expense of our relationship with God, our own health, maybe even our family, we believe something like this:

“My company, my ministry, the people under my care...they depend on me. I need to be available so things can keep running the way they're supposed to. I can't unplug, because then people who need me can't get a hold of me. And if you need me on my day off with my family...well, let's just say my day off is very optional. If a need arises, I'm your person.”

We may feel like we have the weight of the world on our shoulders. If we slow down, it will all fall apart. Here's the thing: Jesus *did* have the weight of the world on His shoulders. And He still made regular time for Sabbath, prayer and rest.

This may sound strange, but I sometimes imagine a group of marketplace Christ-followers talking at dinner and speaking about the seemingly noble reasons why they have to work around the clock.

“I'm responsible for a company with 200 employees. If I take time away, the company may lose momentum and they could lose their jobs.”

“I'm a teacher. If I don't help with all these after school clubs, no one will. I can't let the parents and students down by allowing a club to go unmanned.”

Others share, and then Jesus sits down at the table. They all find out He *does* take regular time for Solitude, Scripture, and Sabbath. He must not be responsible for as much as them, so they ask Him what He's got on His plate.

“I'm responsible for the eternal destiny of every human who has ever lived. If I fail, humanity is lost. Forever.”

Okay, I know that's sort of a ridiculous scenario, but seriously let's think about this.

Let's stack whatever load we think we have to carry up next to Jesus' load. Does *anything* come *close*?

What was Jesus' secret? What did He believe about life that drove Him to spend regular time in prayer and Sabbath rest? It's really quite simple. It's the truth we need to hold onto in order to get past this hurdle.

God is great, and He is in control.

If we'll drop our day off, our time with God, or family time just about *any* time in order to "keep things running," do we really believe God is in control? Or do we think He *needs* us to handle it?

When we take the time to abide and rest, we communicate to God that we believe *He* is big enough to manage the world just fine without us; that we think He's actually big enough to fill the vacancy left by our absence. It shows our trust that *He* is in control.

I know. Life can be crazy. I'm not saying there aren't exceptions. If there is an emergency—a *real* emergency—we may need to take our day off later in the week.

I'm not saying taking time out won't require some coordination and planning. It may mean handing some of the load over to someone else, or asking for a consistent day off, or letting people deal with some things themselves, or telling clients or co-workers, "If you call me at this time, I won't answer." It will likely mean quitting some things.

This is all just part of being intentional about living as though God really is in control, and that we depend on Him, not He on us. God beckons, "*Be still, and know I am God.*"¹⁰

2. "I can't say 'no.'"

Some of us don't rest because we feel guilty saying no. "What if I disappoint this person? What if they think I don't like them? Shouldn't I help, because that's what Christ-followers do? How will someone see Christ's love in me if I say no to them?" So the guilt keeps us saying yes—and instead of running our schedules, our schedules run us.

Here's the ironic thing about not being able to say no: Even when we say 'yes', we **are** saying no—to whatever or whoever *else* could have been filling that time.

Did Jesus say no to anyone? Yep. In Mark 1, after Jesus spent the night in prayer a town full of people wanted Him to come back for more of that Kingdom stuff He was offering. You know what He said? "Time to go on to the next town."

Would going back to that town to preach and heal have been a good thing? Sure sounds like it! But that particular stop was not on His Father's agenda, so He gave up the *good* thing for the greater, "God" thing.

Not being able to say no creates a spiral effect. It's in the place of abiding where we gain discernment between the many good things and the few *essential* things. When we don't leave that space for God, we will often fail to discern. So we say yes to more "good" stuff, often out of guilt, which in turn leaves less space for abiding.

How do we distinguish between the *essential* and the merely good?¹¹ It helps to have a Filter. In Scripture, there appears to be a way we are to prioritize our lives, based on the covenants of which we are a part: With God, with our Spouses and children, and with the rest of the family of God:

- Our first priority is to be the health of our covenant relationship with God (abiding is key to this!)
- As we seek Him first, we are called next to be faithful in our relationships with our spouse, and subsequently our children.
- Together with God and our families, we go forth to fulfill our Current Callings as part of the greater family of God, the church. They're how we're putting our lives into PLAY for God's kingdom, both within the body of Christ and on our mission in the world.
- Fourth come our other responsibilities, such as our jobs and school.

Certainly, there is overlap in these areas; it's not cut and dry. We work our jobs to sustain our spouses and children. We may go to school to fulfill a current calling.

It is important that we prioritize the health of these relationships in order from top to bottom. How can I help others seek God first, if my own relationship with Him comes in seventh place on my list of priorities? Imagine how much more effective our words will be when our lives back them.

So, when a request comes our way, we can drop it through this filter. Will adding this to my life knock my family out of second? Will "busy" start replacing God, family, and callings? If I determine that it's something I want or need to say yes to, is there something else I need to drop?

By living this way, we embrace a simple truth: *God and His agenda come first.*¹²

We will be empowered to say "no" when necessary, not from a place of guilt, but from a place of *conviction* that God calls me first to be faithful to Him.

3. I (or my family) might miss out.

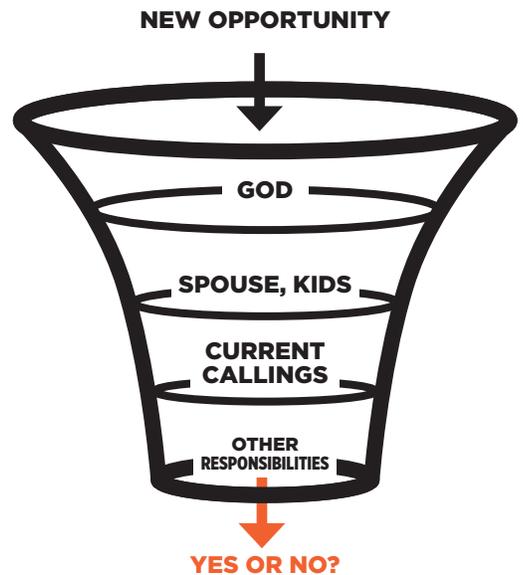
"The neighbor's kids are already black belts, and they're only 6!
Are my kids keeping up?"

"My friend from college just visited Africa. What am I doing to create meaningful memories?"

"What if I'm missing something really funny or relevant on social media right now?"

"What if I commit to serving regularly at a food pantry when another form of service could be a better fit?"

"I saw a picture of three of my friends at dinner last night.
Did I miss the memo?"



¹¹ A great book that addresses living "essentially," is Essentialism by Greg McKeown

¹² "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." -Matthew 6:33.

It's called "FOMO": the Fear Of Missing Out.

This term, popularized by Caterina Fake, is "a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent".

Sometimes hearing about the experiences of others can, in a healthy way, inspire us to try new things. And sometimes, it can just make us anxious and discontent.

This fear is similar to the inability to say "no," in that no matter what I'm doing, I'm *always* going to be missing out on what I'm *not* doing at that time. So we cram more things into our and our family's lives to alleviate the fear.

How's that working for us?

This cramming often leaves little space for abiding and rest. In fact, this fear often creeps into our abiding time, whispering, "What are you missing out on while you're taking this time out from life? What's happening on Facebook?"

Here, it is again helpful to apply the filter—but before that will work, we need to address the underlying belief. The lie we believe is that "There's something better out there I'm missing."

The truth? **Jesus is enough.**

He is more than enough to satisfy us. He is the source of real, abundant life. Through Him we can learn to be content *whatever* the circumstances, as Paul did. He is *Good*. And how do we learn to access that goodness?

We abide.

We won't miss out—not on the *real* stuff—if we abide.

Because when we make space for abiding, we position ourselves to receive from the God of abundant life, from our Good, Good Father. We need Him more than we need our next breath.

Will you believe it?

Abide in Him. "Busy" will take its place at key points, where it belongs. And your life will be fruitful.