

# I'm busy because I'm lazy

By Reagan Rose

We tend to think of busyness as the domain of the disciplined. We picture the bustling office worker, the fully-scheduled pastor, or the active homemaker who can do it all, kids in tow. But there is a kind of busyness which, far from being productive, serves as a cloak for laziness.

C.S. Lewis notes, “Teachers will tell you that the laziest boy in the class is the one who works hardest in the end.” I concur with Lewis. As I’ve noted before, [the hard way tends to be the easy way](#). But what if this extends to busyness as well? What if by choosing to stay busy all the time, we are not being more productive, but actually being lazy?

This strikes us as oxymoronic because busyness is a kind of hard work. But busyness can also be a way to hide from a more difficult kind of work—making difficult decisions.

Picking up on Lewis, Eugene Peterson states the problem clearly, “I am busy because I am lazy. I indolently let others decide what I will do instead of resolutely deciding myself.” He concludes, “By lazily abdicating the essential work of deciding and directing, establishing values and setting goals, other people do it for us.”

The laziness Peterson is describing is a refusal to *slow down* enough to make a plan and decide what is most important. Ironically, by staying so busy that we can’t think, we are actually failing to take the task of stewardship seriously.

What could be easier than stopping? What is more effortless than slowing down? Yet, slowing down requires an incredible force of will. When life feels busy and out of control, every instinct tells us that we need to go faster, not slower. But this is folly. If you feel your life is spinning out of control with overcommitment and busyness, acceleration is the last thing you need!

If a factory owner observed that every product coming off the line had some marked flaw in it, would he tell his workers, “Keep going, we need to meet quota!” No, the sooner he stops, the less material and time he will waste. So why is it so hard for us to see that same truth when it comes to busyness in our lives?

Because decisions push us in the opposite direction from efficiency, and their results are hard to measure. When we see personal productivity purely as a matter of efficiency, we find it very hard to tolerate anything that slows us down. But more often than not, the most valuable things we do cannot be measured at all.

Let me offer a personal example. In terms of measurable outputs, taking a walk is the most unproductive thing I do each day. I can't write while I'm walking, or work on my computer. Nothing is "getting done" when I'm strolling in the woods. But I've come to see that, in truth, my walks are the most productive part of my week. And I don't just mean for my exercise.

It is on these walks that my biggest decisions get made. Upon reflection, I dare say that *all* of the biggest changes in direction for my life, work, and family have occurred on walks, vacations, or in casual conversations—precisely when I am not busy.

Busyness might move you forward linearly. Things get checked off the list, you live to fight another day. But decisions have leverage. The trouble is that busyness and decisions are like oil and water. If you try to mark your productivity only by hours spent at the computer, laundry washed, meetings attended, or emails sent, you're not accounting for the most important productivity factor of all: What you choose to work on is astronomically more important than how efficiently you work on it. Nor are you accounting for the fact that the most important output is the good fruit that comes as a byproduct of your working as unto the Lord.

There is a time for sitting down and doing the work and being a busy bee. But if you aren't building into your life deliberate time to slow down and *think* about what you're doing and where you're heading, you may find yourself in a place you didn't intend to go, busily working your way to a future you don't even want.

So don't be lazy, slow down.

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