



## The Anesthesia of Busyness: When Doing More Means Feeling Less

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As disciples of Christ, it can often feel like we have too much to do and not enough time to do it. After all, as Elder Okechukwu Imo [said](#), “Becoming and remaining faithful disciples of Jesus Christ requires constant work ...” and don’t we know it. Members have been encouraged to prioritize scripture study, family time, temple attendance, church callings, ministering, and so forth. Frequently, these many ‘to-dos’ can feel overwhelming. Indeed, it is not uncommon for members of the Church to feel as though they are running through the motions, checking off the items on their list rather than feeling like they are spending genuine time communing with God and others. Particularly within contemporary American culture, to be busy is to be prestigious. As Elder Uchtdorf [puts](#) it, “We even wear our busyness as a badge of honor, as though

being busy, by itself, was an accomplishment or sign of superior life.” But being busy is not the point of the gospel, though it can feel good.

However, being hurried or productive seems to be the golden standard of living. The constant, persistent messaging across various lifestyles seems to promote the idea that we are never doing enough, that we can always do more, and that, in doing more, we are ultimately better for it.

When we put all these varying demands on our time together, it can feel like an impossible standard to meet. We ask, “How am I supposed to do *all* of these things?” Perhaps the answer is simple: *we are not meant to do all of them*. In fact, being busy can detract from the actual purpose of this life. As John Otberg, a well-known Christian author, [said](#):

For many of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them.

Within contemporary culture, moderation is not the name of the game ... making stillness almost impossible.

How does the clutter of our life, even things we try to do within religious practices, distract us from the things that truly matter? How can we find the power to focus our lives in ways that edify, uplift, and draw us closer to Christ?

Spoiler alert—the answer is not “doing more.”

## The Concept of Anesthesia

There are a plethora of ways to keep busy. We can fill our lives with never-ending demands, hurrying from one obligation to another, or activities that do not outwardly look busy but are usually intended to keep the mind busy, like [social media](#), video games, sports entertainment, or binge-watching TV shows. Objectively, none of these things are inherently bad. I myself, enjoy an occasional movie marathon. But within contemporary culture, moderation is not the name of the game. Both kinds of busyness

tend to create an environment in which it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to engage in any sort of mindful presence or stillness.

Anesthesia is typically a word we hear in surgical environments, but in thinking of my own life, I found it to be a sobering and often accurate account of what it feels like to keep busy in both kinds of ways. Put simply, it is a “numbing” agent. In numbing our lives through kinds of busyness, we certainly try to avoid the pain, suffering, and unpleasant parts of the human experience. It is not uncommon when I’m working in a therapeutic setting, for people to avoid any kind of mindful practice because it often brings awareness to their own experience with pain and suffering. As authors of the prominent book *The Power of Stillness* note: “The truth is that some find ... silence and stillness terrifying—even painful.” It is much more comfortable to remain in a state of numbness than to confront the difficult parts of life and find healing.

However, an often unintentional consequence of this numbing is that we don’t usually have the option to numb only those unpleasant feelings or experiences. Think of it this way: if I had a terrible pain in my knee and my solution was to sever my spinal cord, sure, my pain would be gone, but so would the entire functioning of my legs. Pain and suffering are a jarring experience, to be sure. But the solution to this is not to sever the connection; it is to heal what needs healing. When we cut off our ability to be mindfully present in our lives to avoid pain or suffering, we tend to numb ourselves to the *whole* of human experience, including joy, happiness, fun, and peace. I think we see this sort of logic reflected in the [Book of Mormon](#) as well:

For it must needs be, that there is opposition in all things. If not so ... righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body, it must needs remain as dead, having no life, neither death nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility.

This idea that we need to take the hurt, pain, and suffering in order to find true happiness, joy, and peace is not a new idea. Peace, love, joy, and happiness are, instead, found in opposition—wading through those difficult experiences, not attempting to skirt around them. I found this quote from Friedrich Nietzsche as he reflected on

certain behaviors he observed in his own times. It is tragically relatable. He [commented](#):

If you refuse to let your own suffering lie upon you even for an hour and if you constantly try to prevent and forestall all possible distress way ahead of time [...], then it is clear that you also harbor another religion in your heart that is perhaps the mother of the religion of pity: the religion of comfortableness.

The comfort I think Nietzsche is pointing out here can often be described instead as familiarity. Meaning even if what is familiar is objectively uncomfortable, human beings tend to stay with what they know. And if what one knows is coping with anxiety, discomfort, and stress through busyness, they are not going to feel very comfortable with changing those approaches, even if it actually leads to a better quality of life. To put it more succinctly, it is comfortable to avoid what is unfamiliar.

What is interesting, though, is that keeping perpetually busy actually tends to create [more anxiety](#) in our lives, not less. In the short term, it may feel like a win to avoid, but in the long term, it facilitates the buildup of anxiety rather than the 'letting go' of it. By avoiding the discomfort of difficult experiences and emotions, we actually deprive ourselves of what stillness and mindful presence can eventually bring through intentional practice: lasting peace.

To put it more succinctly, it is comfortable to avoid what is unfamiliar.

## Where Do We Find Lasting Peace?

This lasting peace comes through our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. However, too often, we conflate our relationship with Jesus Christ with the gospel check-list to-do items like church attendance, temple worship, ministering assignments, service projects, scripture study, and any other number of good things. All of which, at their core, are divinely appointed ventures. But, if we only bring our focus and attention to hurry and 'get them done,' we are missing the point and, possibly, doing damage to our relationship with Christ instead.

A little less than a year ago, I was struggling with the busyness of my life and feeling completely overwhelmed. I had felt that I needed to attend the temple more often and made efforts to do so in the midst of my struggles. However, one particular day, I went to the temple wanting to experience peace and stillness, but instead, I had a panic attack.

Imagine feeling so anxious and overwhelmed that you cannot even experience peace in the very presence of God on earth. Adding more to my life at this moment did not add to my relationship with Christ. In fact, I found it very hard to go back to the temple for several months after that.

John Mark Comer, a well-known pastor and author of *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, comments: "Hurry is violence on the soul." Believe me, that day in the temple, I felt the force of that violence on my soul despite the goodness of my desires to add something that, for all intents and purposes, was supposed to help me.

Now, I'm not saying that my desire to go more frequently to the temple was wrong. What I am articulating is that even filling our lives with objectively good things can have a negative impact if we are not mindful of the general environment we have cultivated. Comer [offers](#) some interesting advice in situations such as this: "The solution to an overbusy life is not more time. It's to slow down and simplify our lives around what really matters."

So, how can we slow down and simplify when so many things feel important? I have a few ideas that may help, at least to start.

**Prioritize.** The prompting for me to go to the temple more often was not a mistaken revelation. The invitation was not to add another thing to my already busy life. Rather, it was an invitation from Heavenly Father to reevaluate my priorities and remove the unnecessary clutter to make more space for worship in the temple. When you feel the need to 'add' things to your life, maybe pause and take a moment to evaluate your priorities and see if there is also an invitation to eliminate or reduce something else to create more space.

Be fully present. This may seem like a simple exercise, but it can have a profound effect

**Be Present.** We can greatly improve our experience if we are fully present with what we are doing in real-time.

This is actually a great form of mindfulness. At your kids' soccer game? Great. Be fully present. In a work meeting?

Awesome. Be fully present. Worshipping in the temple? Amazing. Be fully present. This may seem like a simple exercise, but it can have a profound effect in decluttering our lives. We give ourselves and those around us the gift of focus, attention, and presence. That is the ultimate gift of love.

in decluttering  
our lives.

**Observe the Sabbath Day.** In six days, God created the world and everything in it. On the seventh day, He rested. Resting is a God-given commandment. Now, we could really dissect what it means to 'rest,' but for the purposes of this article, I will simply say that to 'rest' is to 'recharge.' We will find rest in that which is good and sanctifying on the Sabbath day. What would it look like to truly give yourself time? Time to commune with God, time to spend with your family, and time to rest from your labors. God has already given us a day to declutter and be unhurried in our lives. Let's use it.

About the author

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Brianna Holmes graduated with a degree in Marriage, Couples, and Family Counseling and is currently a practicing counselor in Utah. Her area of interest is how professionals can focus on the agentic nature of human beings in therapeutic practices. She and her husband are parents to four beautiful children.