

LifeWord Chapter
Summary

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry

John Mark Comer

Trevor Lloyd
© Different Kingdom Publications

Contents

Introduction to LifeWord Summaries	2
Main Message.....	3
Chapter Summaries	3
Prologue: Autobiography of an epidemic.....	3
Part 1 - The Problem	4
Chapter 1 - Hurry: the enemy of spiritual life.....	4
Chapter 2 - A brief history of speed	4
Chapter 3 - Something is deeply wrong	4
Part 2 - The Solution	5
Chapter 4 - Hint: the solution isn't more time	5
Chapter 5 - the secret of the easy yoke.....	5
Chapter 6 - What we're really taking about is a rule of life	6
Intermission - Wait, what are the spiritual disciplines again?.....	6
Part 3 - Four practices for unhurrying your life	7
Chapter 7 - Silence and Solitude	7
Chapter 8 - Sabbath	7
Chapter 9 - Simplicity.....	8
Chapter 10 - Slowing	9
Epilogue - A Quiet Life	9
My Highlights.....	10
Questions for Reflection and Discussion	10
More About the Author	11

Introduction to LifeWord Summaries

LifeWord book summaries are based on two assumptions. The first is that many books, especially those based on Christian truth, are potentially life-imparting, life-transforming and life-shaping. The second is that many Christians are not reading them.

I will always recommend reading the actual books as the ideal, and signpost readers to them and to other books by the writers. But there are various reasons why not every Christian will ever get around to reading many of them.

In writing these summaries, my desire is that people can at least access some of the truths, insights and principles contained in the books. Like someone who has found great treasure, though not able to persuade everyone to explore and sift through it, I can, at least, scoop up some of its riches and share them. My hope is that as well as benefiting from the rich insights from the books I summarise, readers will then go on to explore these and other good books for themselves.

There are three ways you can use LifeWord Summaries:

1. **A *Taster*** - there are many excellent books, old and new, out there but you have limited time. A quick, simple summary helps you to decide in which books you are going to invest your time. (See my book reviews at www.differentkingdom.com also).
2. **A *Refresher*** - you read the book some time ago and are not sure you have time to read it again, though you'd like to. A summary can refresh your memory.
3. **A *Digest*** - whether due to time, inclination or challenges with sustained reading, you know you are unlikely to read a particular book. A summary of the main ideas and insights maybe the next best thing.

The summary of this current book, **The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry** by John Mark Comer, should take approximately 20-25 minutes to read. If you prefer to listen, there will soon be an audio recording of the summary at www.differentkingdom.com which will take about 20 minutes.

Trevor Lloyd (December 2023)

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry

By John Mark Comer

Main Message

The author agrees with many spiritual writers that the greatest enemy of the spiritual life in our time is hurry. It underlies much of the anxiety and other toxic symptoms of modern life, and Christians are not immune to it. Many of us are living superficial lives, hurrying so much through life that we fail to truly attend to God, to others, to the moment, or to our own souls. This way of living is not the way of Jesus, who invites us to take up his 'easy yoke' as his 'apprentices' and find rest for our souls. The author shows that, in practice, this means developing a rule of life - a schedule and set of practices that help us to live a life of abiding in Jesus. He shares four of the practices that have most helped him - silence and solitude, sabbath, simplicity and slowing. These have to be built into our lives deliberately and intentionally. They are not a quick fix formula and take a lifetime of practising but they help us to become true apprentices of Jesus, being with him and becoming like him.

Chapter Summaries

Prologue: Autobiography of an epidemic

The author explains how he came to realise that hurry was robbing him of his main purpose in life - to be an apprentice of Jesus, learning his way of life. He gives some idea of the radical changes he started to make so that he could redirect his life towards becoming the person he wanted to become. He then invites us to join him, especially if we are feeling weary and burdened by life, to discover some of the things that he has learned on this journey.

Part 1 - The Problem

Chapter 1 - Hurry: the enemy of spiritual life

Drawing on two of his main influences - John Ortberg and Dallas Willard - the author explains where the phrase 'ruthless elimination of hurry' came from. He then draws on others to underline how hurry is toxic to the spiritual life. It is incompatible with the main kingdom value of love, and a life characterised by walking - not running - with God. He argues we cannot truly live in the kingdom of God with a hurried soul.

Not only does hurry keep us from the love, joy, peace of the kingdom of God - the very core of what all human beings crave - but it also keeps us from God himself simply by stealing our attention.

Chapter 2 - A brief history of speed

A quick (ironic!) overview of how the pace of life has 'sped up', touching briefly on some of the innovative culprits of this acceleration: the sun-dial, the clock tower, the light bulb, labour-saving devices, the internet and the iPhone. We get less sleep and less of what we thought we'd have more of - leisure! There has been the loss of Sabbath. The internet and Netflix eat away at our time and our attention span - apparently, we have less of an attention span than goldfish! The author argues that '*everything is being intentionally designed for distraction and addiction.*' He quotes from people who have been in this industry, from Silicon Valley, and who are now 'conscientious objectors' to it. He asks the question: what is this pace of life, and the distraction and addiction, doing to our souls?

...it's wise to cultivate a healthy suspicion of technology. Technological, and even economic, progress does not necessarily equal human progress. Just because it's newer and/or faster doesn't mean it's better.

Chapter 3 - Something is deeply wrong

Psychologists talk about '*hurry sickness.*' It is '*a form of violence on the soul.*' The author lists ten symptoms of hurry sickness, including irritability, restlessness and

escapist behaviours. The answer is not guilt and shame, but we do need to take the problem seriously. Hurry sickness is toxic, a threat to our emotional and spiritual health. It eats away at our *‘attention’* - our ability to attend to the moment. Attention leads to awareness, especially our awareness of God. And what we give our attention to determines the person we become. Apprentices of Jesus are called to give their attention to him. This is the secret to living life well.

In the end, your life is no more than the sum of what you gave your attention to.

Part 2 - The Solution

Chapter 4 - Hint: the solution isn't more time

The solution to hurry sickness is not more time but rather to *‘slow down and simplify around what really matters.’* Created in God's image but from dust, we have both potential and limitation. We generally don't like facing our limitations, yet there are many areas in which we are limited, such as our bodies, minds, gifting etc. But our main limitation is time. So, we must make choices and say no to certain things. In other words, we must *‘live deliberately’*. We should honestly recognise how we waste a lot of time and determine to live deliberately? We do this by learning to follow Jesus.

What if...limitations aren't something to fight but to gratefully accept as a signpost to God's call on our souls?

Chapter 5 - the secret of the easy yoke

The author sets out to examine what the way of Jesus might have to say about this epidemic of hurry. He explains what is meant by a 'yoke' in relation to Jesus as a rabbi (teacher) in his day, a way of reading God's law in order to shoulder the weight of life. Jesus claimed that his yoke was 'easy.' To be an apprentice of Jesus, to take his yoke, is to organise our life around three goals: to be with Jesus, to become like him, and to do what he would do. Taking his easy yoke enables us to bear the weight of life and to find rest and healing for our souls. To experience the life of Jesus, we

must adopt the lifestyle practices of Jesus - his way of life. Life is hard and Jesus does not offer us an escape from this reality. Rather, he offers a new way to bear the weight of it - not an easy life, but an easy yoke.

Jesus's invitation is to take up his yoke - to travel through life at his side, learning from him how to shoulder the weight of life with ease. To step out of the burnout society to a life of soul rest.

Chapter 6 - What we're really taking about is a rule of life

Jesus was never in a hurry. He was always present to the person in the moment, even though he was continually interrupted. He was often busy but never hurried, because of the way he lived life. He put 'margin' into his life, often spending time alone with his Father, practising Sabbath and simplicity etc. He lived '*freely and lightly*' and then called us to follow him. The key question is how do we follow Jesus, how do we live like Jesus would live if he were us? By aligning our schedule with our values. In other words, we need a rule of life so we live around what really matters. A rule of life is like a trellis for our life of abiding in Jesus, a schedule and set of practices. We think we don't have time, but we have to reallocate our time to seek his kingdom first. If we don't have time, then we *are* too busy. Are you ready to construct a trellis?

Following Jesus has to make it onto your schedule and into your practices or it will simply never happen. Apprenticeship to Jesus will remain an idea, not a reality in your life.

Intermission - Wait, what are the spiritual disciplines again?

Before moving on to his four core practices, the author explains spiritual disciplines (the traditional name for these practices) by looking at the habits of Jesus in his everyday life. A discipline is '*any activity I can do by direct effort that will eventually enable me to do that which, currently, I cannot do by direct effort.*' With spiritual disciplines, they open us to a power beyond ourselves, the power of God himself. Jesus doesn't command these practices, but he does them and then calls us to follow him. He invites us rather than commands us to follow him in his habits of life.

Part 3 - Four practices for unhurrying your life

Chapter 7 - Silence and Solitude

The digital distraction of our age has robbed us of the opportunity and ability to be bored. Such distraction stops us from being present to the moment, to God, to others, to the world, and to our own souls. The practice from Jesus's life that most helps us with this is the practice of silence and solitude. There are many times mentioned in the gospels when Jesus went to a desert, a mountain, a quiet place. It was a top priority for him. The busier he became, the more he got time alone. This is why there developed in the church over the centuries the spiritual discipline of silence and solitude. There is both external and internal silence. The problem is that we sometimes use external noise to drown out the internal noise. There is also a difference between solitude and isolation, or loneliness. When we fail to practice silence and solitude we continue with a sense of distance from God and ourselves, an 'undercurrent of anxiety', with exhaustion and escapism etc. When we practice it we are more present to ourselves and to God, we slow down, we feel more and we can face our inner selves more honestly. The current emphasis on mindfulness is an example of even the secular world tapping into the benefits of this ancient discipline.

Through church history most of the master teachers of the way of Jesus have agreed: silence and solitude are the most important of all the spiritual disciplines.

Chapter 8 - Sabbath

Desire is good but if it gets out of control, we're in trouble. We will always feel desire for more as life is '*an unfinished symphony*'. This leads to restlessness unless we find our rest in God. If we don't, restlessness leads to hurry. This is encouraged by our culture which is based around accumulation and accomplishment. Jesus provides a response to this problem in the Sabbath. It is more than just a special day. It is a spirit of restfulness, a way of being. Ironically, we must work hard to enter this rest. It takes intentionality, planning, preparation, and self-control. The Sabbath day is 'practice' for this spirit of restfulness as a way of life, and we find

we must slow down the whole week to practice Sabbath well. Our age does not understand Sabbath at all, but ‘*Sabbath was made for man*’. God himself ‘rested’ and has made it part of the grain of the universe that we need to flow with. Sabbath means to stop and to delight. The Sabbath is blessed, a source of fruitfulness, a way ‘*we fill our souls back up with life.*’ The Sabbath is also holy, a temporal space where we go to meet with God. If we keep making excuses for not taking Sabbath, eventually it catches up with us and we face an enforced rest. That is why God commands Sabbath - first as rest and worship, and then as resistance to our enslaving culture, a way of staying free.

...Sabbath isn't just a twenty-four-hour time slot in your weekly schedule; it's a spirit of restfulness that goes with you throughout your week. A way of living with "ease, gratitude, appreciation, peace and prayer." A way of working from rest, not for rest, with nothing to prove

Chapter 9 - Simplicity

In our culture, we often don't like the teaching of Jesus on wealth, possessions and greed. This is partly because, in Western culture, we get our meaning and identity from what we consume. Happiness has become measured by what we possess. It might be called the gospel of consumption and has been a deliberate strategy of advertisers and businessmen in the US and the West. With tragic irony, it is not making us happier but more miserable. The problem is thinking we need more to make us happy. Poverty is not good - don't idealise it - but after a certain level of income, more stuff is more likely to make you miserable. Or there is, at least, a law of diminishing returns. Materialism is damaging the soul. The drive to possess causes hurry, stealing our time as well as our money. So why not follow Jesus's teaching of the good life? He teaches in line with the grain of the universe, and he teaches a lot about wealth. The practice that helps us to embed his teaching into our lives has been called the discipline of simplicity. It is like the modern, secular version known as minimalism. This practice is not about being poor or getting more organised. It's about holding on to what we really value and removing anything that distracts from this. It is about decluttering our lives. And it is about not putting our trust in wealth or in stuff. It is living well in the tension between enjoying the things of the world

but not allowing them to turn us away from God. It is living with ‘a carefree unconcern for possessions.’ The author outlines twelve principles to help us put this discipline into practice,

You simply can't live the freedom way of Jesus and get sucked into the overconsumption that is normal in our society. The two are mutually exclusive. You have to pick.

Chapter 10 - Slowing

It is important to align our schedules with our deepest values, which hopefully centre around living with Jesus and growing more like him. This schedule effectively becomes what previous generations have called a rule of life. Increasingly, it is being recognised that we can approach the disciplines and routines of life ‘gamefully,’ which means looking for ways to make them creative, imaginative and fun. It then becomes a little easier. The author shares several ways he has tried to do this with his ‘disciplines’ - the practices he uses to govern his rule of life and so avoid what has been called ‘hyperliving - skimming the surface of life.’ He uses them to develop what some are now calling the discipline of ‘slowing.’ This is cultivating patience by choosing practices that require us to wait. It involves slowing down our minds and our bodies to slow down our souls. He then goes through the twenty practices that he uses to help him to slow. These include how he drives, how he uses his phone, handles emails, single-tasking, cooking food for the family, and more.

If we can slow down...the pace at which we think and the pace at which we move our bodies through the world...maybe we can slow down our souls to a pace at which they can “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Epilogue - A Quiet Life

The author reflects on how his life is changing as he has been seeking to eliminate hurry from his life. He organises his life around the principles of slowing down, simplifying and living from a centre of abiding. He acknowledges that it takes practice and the four practices he has explored in this book help, but we must continually work on them. We never arrive or reach perfection. We continually

practice. A key is learning to live in the present, the now. To *'inhabit the moment'*. To see time as a gift. To not miss the goodness that is following us every day. In the words of the apostle Paul, as we make it our ambition to live a quiet life, and take up this easy yoke, we find our capacity increases. We must fight for this in our culture, and we must decide it is worth fighting for.

What if the day, what if time itself isn't a scarce resource to seize but a gift to receive with grateful joy?

My Highlights

1. I was challenged to the core by this book. It is so easy to slip into doing life in a hurry, to superficially 'skim the surface of life.' Comer does not hold back from challenging us but never in a way just to leave us in guilt and regret. He offers hope and practical steps for gradual but significant change.
2. Although he has a relaxed and amiable style, the analysis of the problem is not at all superficial. He draws upon a remarkable range of writers, thinkers and commentators in analysing the problem we face in our cultural moment and in our own souls - hurry sickness.
3. I especially liked (or rather was challenged by) the chapter on simplicity. It seems to me that a radical application of Jesus's teaching on wealth and possessions alone would be a major step in demonstrating to our overconsuming world a different way, the way of Jesus. It is so radically countercultural.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do you ever feel that you are 'skimming the surface of life'? When you stop and think about that question, how does it make you feel? What do you want to do about it?
2. What is your response to the idea of a rule of life? Does the image of a trellis supporting a vine help you to see the value you of it?
3. Which of the four main practices that the author writes about do you find the most helpful?

4. What changes do you feel you will need to make in your life to start applying some of these practices?

More About the Author



John Mark Comer is an author and formerly pastor of Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon. He now heads up [Practicing the Way](#), a non-profit organisation committed to producing resources for the body of Christ on spiritual formation. He also serves as a teacher at Vintage Church in Los Angeles, California. You can find out more about him at johnmarkcomer.com I am going to be reading more of his books, but I can already highly recommend [Live No Lies](#).