

## **RUTHLESS ELIMINATION OF HURRY: CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE**

*This document offers a chapter-by-chapter discussion guide.*

Questions based on guides created by Community Church, cchud.co.uk

### **Read**

Foreword, Prologue, and Chapter 1

### **Review, Reflect and Discuss**

Feel free to comment and raise any questions that occur to you as you read. Don't be limited to the questions listed after the summaries, but they might help to prime your thinking.

Foreword – John Ortberg commends the book, defines the essence of hurry as 'too much to do', explains why being delivered from it is so important and argues that being delivered from it will mean having 'the ability to do calmly and effectively – with strength and joy – that which really matters.'

Do you recognize how much of a problem hurry is? What would life look like if you were not hurried?

Prologue: Autobiography of an epidemic – JMC explains how he came to realize how hurry was robbing him of his main purpose in life which was to be an apprentice of Jesus, learning his way of life. He gives some idea of the radical changes he started to make so he could become 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.

- *Why might hurry stop us from becoming the person we want to become?*

### **Part 1 – The Problem**

Chapter 1 –Hurry: the enemy of spiritual life – JMC introduces his two main influences – Ortberg and Willard – and explains where the phrase 'ruthless elimination of hurry' came from. He then draws on others, C.S. Lewis among them, to underline how much hurry is toxic to spiritual life. He shows that it is incompatible with the main kingdom value of love, and of a life characterized by walking – not running – with God. Quoting his mentor, John Ortberg, he argues we cannot truly live in the kingdom of God with a hurried soul.

- *What does healthy busyness look like and what does unhealthy busyness look like?*
- *Why are hurry and love incompatible?*
- *JMC quotes Ortberg's concern for the danger that we 'just skim our lives instead of actually living them.' What do you think it means to 'skim our lives'?*

### **Next**

Chapter 2: A Brief History of Speed and Chapter 3: Something is Deeply Wrong.

## Read

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3

### Review, Reflect and Discuss

Feel free to comment and raise any questions that occur to you as you read. Don't be limited to the questions listed after each summary, but they might help to prime your thinking.

Chapter 2 – JMC gives a quick (ironic!) overview of how the pace of life has 'sped up', and touches briefly on some of the innovational culprits of this acceleration: the sun-dial, the clock tower, the light bulb, labor-saving devices, the internet and the iPhone. He points out we get less sleep and less of what we thought we'd have more of – leisure! There has been the loss of Sabbath and the internet and Netflix eat away at our time and our attention span; apparently, we have less of an attention span than goldfish! He 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?

- *Are you convinced by the author's analysis of how the pace of life has increased and that there is an industry that is intentionally seeking to distract us and get us addicted? Is this true or a conspiracy theory? Can you see how it might have drawn you in?*
- *If it is true, what might it be doing to our souls?*

Chapter 3 –. Psychologists talk about 'hurry sickness'. It is 'a form of violence on the soul.' JMC lists 10 symptoms of hurry sickness (I suggest you review them). The answer is not guilt and shame, but we do need to take the problem seriously and recognize that 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.

- *How did you do with that list of the symptoms of hurry sickness? Any you relate to?*
- *In what way is hurry sickness toxic? How does it damage our emotional and spiritual health?*
- *Why do you think that the ability to 'pay attention' is key to following Jesus and living a good life?*

## Next

Chapter 3: Hint, the Solution Isn't More Time and Chapter 4: The Secret of the Easy Yoke.

## Read

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4

### Review, Reflect and Discuss

Feel free to comment and raise any questions that occur to you as you read. Don't be limited to the questions listed after each summary, but they might help to prime your thinking.

Chapter 3 – JMC argues that 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 but JMC lists the various areas in which we are limited. The main one is time. So we have to make choices and say no to certain things. In other words, to 'live deliberately'. We should, then, honestly recognize how we waste a lot of time and determine to live deliberately? We do this by learning to follow Jesus.

- *Read again about the various ways in which we are limited. Can you be honest about your limitations? How helpful do you find it to honestly face these limitations?*
- *In what ways do you waste time?*
- *What would it look like for you to 'live deliberately'?*

Chapter 4 – 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. Jesus claimed that his yoke was 'easy.' To be an apprentice of Jesus, to take his yoke, is to organize our life around 3 goals: to be with Jesus, become like him, and 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 have to adopt the lifestyle practices of Jesus – his way of life. Life is hard and Jesus does not offer us an escape from this reality but he offers a new way to bear the weight of it – not an easy life, but an easy yoke.

- *What would it mean for you to organize your life around the 3 goals that JMS mentions?*
- *In what way is life hard, and in what way can bearing the yoke of Jesus be experienced as easy? Is this how you have experienced it?*

## Next

Chapter 5: Rule of Life and Intermission

## Read

### Chapter 5 and Intermission

#### Review, Reflect and Discuss

Feel free to comment and raise any questions that occur to you as you read. Don't be limited to the questions listed after each summary, but they might help to prime your thinking.

Chapter 5 – 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 did life. He put 'margin' into his life, often spending time alone with his Father, practicing 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 so that it's 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?

- *What is it about Jesus that gives his life that unhurried feel? How did he manage to be busy but never in a hurry?*
- *What would you need to do to live around what really matters?*
- *What would a trellis – a rule of life – look like for you?*

Intermission – before moving on to his four core practices, JMC 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 can not 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.

- *What comes into your mind when you think of discipline and spiritual disciplines?*
- *Do JMC's definition of discipline and Dallas Willard's definition of spiritual discipline help you to understand and respond to the idea of spiritual disciplines?*

## Next

### Chapter 6: Silence and Solitude.

## Read

### Chapter 5: Silence and Solitude

## Review, Reflect and Discuss

Feel free to comment and raise any questions that occur to you as you read. Don't be limited to the questions listed after each summary, but they might help to prime your thinking.

Chapter 6 – reflecting on the digital distraction that has robbed us of the opportunity and ability to be bored, especially for young adults, JMC argues that such distraction stops us from being present to the moment, to God, to others, to the world and our own souls. He argues that the practice from Jesus' life that most helps us with this is the practice of silence and solitude. He examines the many times it mentions in the gospels that Jesus went to a desert, a mountain, quiet place – an 'eremos', how often 'Jesus withdrew.' It was a top priority for him. The busier he became, the more he got time alone. He then reflects on the ancient spiritual discipline of silence and solitude. He points out there is both external and internal silence. The problem is we sometimes use external noise to drown out the internal noise. He also distinguishes between solitude and isolation, or loneliness. Quoting some spiritual heroes, he argues for how absolutely vital this practice is, listing the consequences when we don't practice it and the benefits when we do. He sees the current emphasis on mindfulness as an example of the secular world tapping into the benefits of this ancient discipline. He ends by encouraging a return to 'the quiet time'.

- *Do you find yourself affected by 'digital distraction?' What other things bring noise and distraction into your life?*
- *Do you ever use 'external noise' to drown out 'internal noise?' What is the internal noise for you?*
- *Why do you think JMC argues this discipline is so essential?*
- *What would it look like for you to start practicing this discipline?*

## Next

### Chapter 7: Sabbath

## Read

### Chapter 7: Sabbath

#### Review, Reflect and Discuss

Feel free to comment and raise any questions that occur to you as you read. Don't be limited to the questions listed after each summary, but they might help to prime your thinking.

Chapter 7 – 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, and this is encouraged by our culture which is based around accumulation and accomplishment. Jesus provides a response to this problem in the Sabbath. More than just a day, it is a spirit of restfulness, a way of being. Ironically we have to 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 have to slow down the whole week to practice Sabbath well. Our age does not get 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 and not against. 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, eventually Sabbath catches up with us and we face an enforced rest. That is why God commands Sabbath – first as rest and worship (understood broadly), and then also as resistance to our enslaving culture, a way of staying free! JMC then shares some of the practical ways he and his family practice Sabbath.

- *What comes into your mind when you think of the word, Sabbath?*
- *In what ways do our human condition and our surrounding culture encourage a spirit of restlessness?*
- *How do you think Sabbath could help 'fill your soul back up with life'?*
- *What would it look like for you to start getting really intentional about practicing Sabbath?*

## Next

### Chapter 8: Simplicity

## Read

### Chapter 8: Simplicity

#### Review, Reflect and Discuss

Feel free to comment and raise any questions that occur to you as you read. Don't be limited to the questions listed after each summary, but they might help to prime your thinking.

Chapter 8 – 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. Called the gospel of consumption, this has been a deliberate strategy of the advertisers and businessmen in America 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, taking 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, including 25% of the Sermon on the Mount. The practice that helps us to embed his teaching into our lives has been called the discipline of simplicity. It is similar to the modern, secular version known as minimalism. This practice is not about being poor or getting more organized; 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.' JMC then lists 12 principles about the discipline of simplicity and gives some practical advice about how we can begin to put it into practice, so that we start to learn the secret of contentment.

- *Are you aware of the gospel of consumption and can you identify ways in which you are affected by it?*
- *How does materialism take our time as well as our money?*
- *Which of Jesus's teachings about wealth and stuff really spoke to, and challenged, you?*
- *What would it look like for you to start getting intentional about practicing simplicity?*

## Next

### Chapter 9: Slowing

## Read

### Chapter 9: Slowing

#### Review, Reflect and Discuss

Feel free to comment and raise any questions that occur to you as you read. Don't be limited to the questions listed after each summary, but they might help to prime your thinking.

Chapter 9 – It is important to align our schedules with our deepest values, which hopefully center 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 recognized that if we can approach the disciplines and routines of life 'gamefully' – looking for ways to make them creative, imaginative and fun, it becomes a little easier. JMC shares some of the 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', which is cultivating patience by choosing practices that require us to wait. It involves slowing down our minds and our bodies so as to slow down our souls. JMC goes through the 20 practices that he uses, from how he drives, to how he uses his phone, to handling emails, to single-tasking, to solitude and silence, to cooking food for the family, and so on.

- *Do you have a 'rule of life'? How do you feel about the idea of having one?*
- *Does it make it easier to approach the idea of spiritual discipline and a rule of life, if we approach it 'gamefully'?*
- *Which of JMC's practices most resonated for you and you could see yourself trying?*
- *Which did you find most surprising and you would find difficult to practice?*
- *What others can you think of or do you presently practice?*

## Next

### Epilogue

## Read

### Epilogue

#### Review, Reflect and Discuss

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Epilogue – JMC reflects on how his life is changing as he has been seeking to eliminate hurry from his life. He is organizing 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 he acknowledges we have to continually work on them. We never arrive or reach perfection. We continually practice. He suggests that 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. He shares the verse about making it our ambition to live a quiet life, and as we do this and take up this easy yoke we find our capacity increases. We have to fight for this in our culture, and we have to decide it is worth fighting for.

- *Do you find your life changing in any way as you have started to apply these practices?*
- *How do we 'inhabit the moment'?*
- *How do we live a quiet life and still be productive?*

#### Final Reflections

We have now finished the book. We have learned about the dangers and cost of hurry sickness and about four key practices to help us eliminate hurry from our lives: silence and solitude, Sabbath, simplifying and slowing. We acknowledge that this is going to be a lifetime of working on these, rather than perfecting them, and it will be a struggle at times. But it is worth it!

- *What are the main things that you have learned from this book?*
- *What do you think you might change as a result of reading this book?*

#### Moving Forward

John Mark Comer recognizes that it is easy to read a book, see the value of what it teaches but then not really take the time to practically apply what we learn. He has therefore produced a Workbook to accompany this book and you can find it here:

[www.pleasanthillschurch.com/books](http://www.pleasanthillschurch.com/books)