



BUSY IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD

Thoughts, tips, and inspiration for staying sane in a fast-paced world | by Kim & Jason Kotecki

Kim & Jason

This ebook is all about busyness. Namely, how to keep it from taking over your life. We believe that there is more to life than the hectic busyness, cynical melancholy and overwhelming stress that is typical of most modern lives. If you can relate to the concept of life feeling like one big blur, or know what it's like to wish you could add even one more hour to your day, this book is for you. It's made up of blog posts, magazine articles, and book chapters we've written over the years on this very subject.

A brief word of warning: The contents within will call you out on the carpet and may challenge your thoughts and actions. We're not going to beat around the bush. Life is too short, and your life is too valuable to waste another minute caught up in the hurricane of busyness, stress, and overwhelm.

Life was not designed to be this way, and you have what it takes to transform your life into one that's way less stressful and way more fun. If that sounds cool, read on.



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Questions? Comments? Awesome cherry pie recipes?

Email us: kj@kimandjason.com



Busy: The New Four- Letter Word

by Kim

Everyone is busy. Enough already.

Do you find yourself unknowingly getting thrown into the “busyness” contest? Whether it’s at work or with family or acquaintances, people start talking about how busy they are. Before you know it, you too are spouting about how little time you have. For some reason, it seems like the busiest person wins.

What a twisted and damaging conversation!

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I am officially making “busy” a bad word, in order to avoid the trap of not only the aforementioned conversation, but mostly the mentality. It’s poisonous. The funny thing is that everyone has the same amount of time, so if you are “busy,” it’s your own fault. ***The flaw is in you.***

The other day we got a comment from someone unsubscribing from the [K&J Insider](#), our free e-newsletter. Since we are always looking for ways to improve it, after someone unsubscribes there is a comment box, which is *not* a required field. It says, “We care what you think. Please give us your feedback on the Kim & Jason Insider so we can make it better for everyone. Thanks!” This particular unsubcriber chose to take the time to comment, sharing, “I didn’t really want to spend time explaining why I am asking you to take me off the list. Time is what I don’t have. It’s a great site, just not interested anymore.”

Ironically, she spent even more time telling me that she doesn’t have any time. How funny! The line that struck me is, “Time is what I don’t have.” People love to be martyrs about their time.

Admit that you do have enough time. So much of it, that you don’t have to be so busy. It’s all about the little choices you make every day, your time management, and your priorities. It all comes back to you.

Has the modern culture's obsession with the "I'm so busy" mantra turned into a crutch that enables you to avoid taking 100% responsibility for your life?

It's time to stop talking about how "busy" you are and start doing something about it. ✨



photo by [Matt Niemi](#)

Trading the Cracker Jack Prizes for the Peanuts

by Jason

What good is life if you can't slow down long enough to enjoy it once in a while?

Kim and I had a fortunate opportunity come our way last Friday night. We spent the bulk of the day downtown at a café with our laptops open, writing, thinking, and dreaming. As we packed up to go home, a young woman (and fellow Mac user) sitting nearby offered us two free tickets to the Madison Symphony Orchestra. The face value was over sixty bucks each. She told us

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she wasn't able to use them and was hoping to find someone who could.

What the heck, we thought.

A few hours later, I found myself sitting in Madison's new Overture Center, all spruced up and ready for some culture.

I am sure that the full magnificence of the performance was somewhat lost on me. But I can certainly say that it was wonderful to watch people who are really good at what they do, even if I don't know the difference between a viola and a cello. A world-renowned pianist was a featured guest. He had a bucketful of prestigious awards that I had never heard of, and yet even I could tell that he didn't just play music, he lived it. It was a part of him.

It was nice to sit there and take it all in. To relax, just letting the music stir my soul and refresh my spirit. I am grateful for the generosity of that nice Mac girl, whose name I never did get.

Later that night, I stumbled upon the report of a little experiment that *The Washington Post* recently conducted. They wanted to know what would happen if a world-famous classical musician played, not in a concert hall, but in a Washington D.C. train station, in the middle of morning rush hour. Would people

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know who he was? Would they at least realize that he wasn't your average street musician, and take a few moments to take in the free concert? Would they marvel at his \$3.5 million Stradivarius? And exactly how long would it take for his violin case to be filled up with tens and twentys?

The musician *The Post* tapped for the experiment was a man named Joshua Bell, a 39-year old, critically acclaimed virtuoso. Ironically, I had heard of Joshua Bell for the first time in my life just hours earlier; it was announced he'd be playing a one-night-only performance in Madison at the Overture Center.

For a little less than an hour, Bell played some of the most difficult and other-worldly musical pieces known to man. Almost 1,100 people walked by.

Only seven people stopped, at least for a minute. Twenty-seven gave money as they walked by—some just pennies—for a total of \$32.17.

1,070 of the people passed without giving the performer even a quick glance.

The Washington Post interviewed people after they passed by. One man, Calvin Myint, walked within four feet of Bell, and

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didn't have so much as a memory of seeing a musician. He was wearing his iPod.

The song that Calvin Myint was listening to was "Just Like Heaven," by the British rock band The Cure. It's a terrific song, actually. The meaning is a little opaque, and the Web is filled with earnest efforts to deconstruct it. Many are far-fetched, but some are right on point: It's about a tragic emotional disconnect. A man has found the woman of his dreams but can't express the depth of his feeling for her until she's gone. It's about failing to see the beauty of what's plainly in front of your eyes.

We are prone to that, aren't we? **We get so caught up in busyness that we miss some of the best parts of life.**

In my presentations, I often liken these little "best parts" to Cracker Jack® prizes. God has scattered these free prizes all around us: a watercolor sunset, the smell of fresh cut grass, the intricacy of a snowflake. We're so busy being self-absorbed and stressed-out that we miss them all because they're hidden just below the surface of our hurried consciousness. How sad must it be for the Creator of the Universe to have made all of these spectacular prizes for us to enjoy, while we mindlessly pass them by every single day. Brennan Manning writes along this same vein in *The Ragamuffin Gospel*:

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kid away

We get so preoccupied with ourselves, the words we speak, the plans and projects we conceive, that we become immune to the glory of creation. We barely notice the cloud passing over the moon or the dewdrops clinging to the rose petals. The ice on the pond comes and goes. The wild blackberries ripen and wither. The blackbird nests outside our bedroom window, but we don't see her. We avoid the cold and the heat. We refrigerate ourselves in summer and entomb ourselves in plastic in winter. We rake up every leaf as fast as it falls.

The reality of these words is heartbreakingly true. But it wasn't always this way for us. We were all children once. For *The Post* story points out:

There was no ethnic or demographic pattern to distinguish the people who stayed to watch Bell, or the ones who gave money, from that vast majority who hurried on past, unheeding. Whites, blacks and Asians, young and old, men and women, were represented in all three groups. But the behavior of one demographic remained absolutely consistent. Every single time a child walked past, he or she tried to stop and watch. And every single time, a parent scooted the kid away...

...The poet Billy Collins once laughingly observed that all babies are born with a knowledge of poetry, because the lub-

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dub of the mother's heart is in iambic meter. Then, Collins said, life slowly starts to choke the poetry out of us. It may be true with music, too.

It saddens me to think of how many times I've obsessively concerned myself with the trivial, while missing the magical. Oh, how tragically often do we trade the Cracker Jack prize for the peanuts?

The problem is a grave one. Edna Souza hails from Brazil and was shining shoes at L'Enfant Plaza the day Joshua Bell performed for an audience of ghosts. She knows the problem firsthand; she sees it every day.

Souza was surprised to learn he was a famous musician, but not that people rushed blindly by him. That, she said, was predictable. "If something like this happened in Brazil, everyone would stand around to see. Not here."

Souza nods sourly toward a spot near the top of the escalator: "Couple of years ago, a homeless guy died right there. He just lay down there and died. The police came, an ambulance came, and no one even stopped to see or slowed down to look.

"People walk up the escalator, they look straight ahead. Mind your own business, eyes forward. Everyone is stressed. Do you know what I mean?"

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The home page of Adultitis.org claims that Adulthood has transformed people into zombie-like doo doo heads. I marveled at my cleverness when I first wrote it, but now my stomach turns from its truth. The epidemic marches on, choking the beauty and value of life out of each successive generation. Its life-stealing grip is passed down to our children like some sort of twisted family tradition.

I believe there is hope. The choice for change is our own. Opportunities to turn the tide present themselves every day. Sometimes in the form of a violin virtuoso on your morning commute, sometimes in the form of free tickets from a stranger when you're tired and just want to go home. I am grateful that I took the opportunity to experience the concert Friday night, to drink in a moment I am richer for, and won't soon forget. The struggle against Adulthood is a daily one, but one worth fighting.

Gene Weingarten says in his *Post* article, "If we can't take the time out of our lives to stay a moment and listen to one of the best musicians on Earth play some of the best music ever written; if the surge of modern life so overpowers us that we are deaf and blind to something like that—then what else are we missing?"

An awful lot, it turns out. ❄️



When Life is Like a Jar of Muddy Water

by Jason

Kim and I are kicking around the idea of taking a week off and do absolutely NOTHING. To be honest, I'd love to be locked in a lake side cabin up north somewhere, but we don't have the funds to do anything fancy like that. If it happens, it'll probably be a low-tech, in-house sort of thing. No phones, no TV, maybe even no e-mail. Right now, the idea is as frightening as it is tempting — a whole week off? The company will surely implode, won't it?

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The reality is that in order to really work smarter, we need a little time to detox. Somehow our society got the idea that “busy” is good and admirable; a sign that we’re successful. As I mention in *Escape Adulthood*, even our *vacations* are busy. Gotta do and see everything you possibly can. Those vacations can be fun, but our bodies (and souls) need some quiet time away, too. It’s like we’re jars of muddy water. When we’re busy and in constant motion, things can get pretty cloudy. But if we take the time to sit for a bit, the dirt settles, and life gets clearer. You can shake the jar as forcefully as you want (work harder), but until you actually STOP, you won’t be able to see clearly, allowing yourself to work smarter.

In an [article on thestar.com](#), Ruth Liew makes some really good points. She accurately points out the aversion of adults to silence:

Many people are stressed out in their daily lives. They are unable to gain composure. Anxiety rises when they try to be tranquil. They get worried when there is silence. They need to be in a room that is filled with sounds from all directions. They chatter away without thinking much about what they are saying.

Most adults get anxious when it gets too quiet. Joggers wear headphones and listen to music as they exercise in the morn-

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ings. Some restaurants have television sets mounted in every corner. We carry our mobile phones wherever we go.

The whole article is a gem worth reading, but here are a few more highlights from Ruth:

Young children like a quiet hideaway place. Sometimes this place is in a discarded box or a space under the stairs or a wardrobe. Some children crawl under the bed or the dining table and imagine they are in another, faraway place.

When children are given free time, they tend to achieve more because they are not stressed by demands. I remember watching a precocious three-year-old who seemed a little “lost” in her nursery school. While the other children were in their respective classrooms, she would lie down on a large cushion and perform her own soliloquies.

She would say, “I don’t know why I don’t have any friends. I like them but they don’t like me. What shall I do?” After uttering those words, she got up and went to meet her peers in the next room. She had worked it all out by herself. Children discover their inner selves when they retreat from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

The article really focuses on children, and how important it is for parents to allow their kids opportunities for some quiet. But I think the lesson the lesson is applicable to all of us.

When life gets muddy and out of control, the secret to a clarity is to find a secret hideaway place, slow down, and shut up. ✨



The Thing You Have To Stop & 5 Ways to Do It

by Kim

With Adulthood running rampant, it's not a surprise that one of the major symptoms has become the new normal for many people. What am I speaking of? Being *rushed*. Do you ever feel rushed? Why? What makes you move so quickly? Whether you want to admit it or not, being rushed is one of the most unappealing traits that you can adopt. You're letting your outside circumstances rule your reality. You are being reactive, instead of proactive. You say "yes" far too often. It's time to stop.

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In the last six months, in my efforts to adjust to being a mommy, I have had many a temptation to rush. Hurry and get that done while she's sleeping...real quick, gotta get that phone call made while she's in daddy's arms. Go...go...go! When I catch myself running (even if only in my head), I stop and remind myself what the example of my behavior will teach Lucy. Yikes! That stops me in my tracks. Adultitis is highly contagious and, as with every other disease out there, the weak and the young are the first to be susceptible. I also remind myself that Jesus was never rushed. He was here for a short 33 years (time was limited). He had a HUGE mission to accomplish (much bigger than yours or mine), and yet he modeled rest and prayer...two major ways to combat rushing.

Honestly, we could all be rushing around like chickens with our heads cut off. Our "to do" lists would attest to that, but it is simply no way to live. The dirty little secret is that if you are rushed all of the time, sooner than later, people will start to dislike being around you. The even dirtier secret is that you will inevitably start to dislike yourself. Stop the madness! Start with these five steps...

1. Do not over schedule yourself. There's a lot of talk about kids being over scheduled, and this is often the case, as the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. As my dear friend and colleague Eliz Greene reminds people, saying no to something is actually saying yes to your family and yourself.

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2. Lower your expectations. The house doesn't have to be shiny. The clothes don't always have to be ironed. Find a way within yourself to let some things go, so that you can create more time.

3. Breathe deep and often. Don't wait until it's too late to take some time for yourself. Would you rather have an overnight stay at a hospital or a resort? If the resort is just out of reach, how about an evening bubble bath, a morning walk, or just some silence in the car in the morning? These are all easy gifts to give yourself amidst the busyness.

4. Delegate and cooperate. Don't be a martyr. Ask for help. Trade services with friends or coworkers. Divide chores in the household. Get creative in your schedule and be willing to admit that you cannot do it all. Jason and I are breaking all sorts of rules in the way we divide up the labor – he cooks, I clean. He grocery shops, I mow. Try to compromise and stick to the things you don't hate to do.

5. Laugh and play everyday. You officially have permission to be childlike and to bring play back into your life. There's no excuse for limited laughter in your life. With the Internet at your fingertips, there are countless sites that will help you increase your laugh quota for the day. Start with this one: Awkward Family Photos. ❄️



Doing Nothing

by Jason

We've gotten lots and lots of parenting advice over the past year. A majority of it has been unsolicited, but for the most part, it has all been very well intentioned.

By far the most common bit of advice has been something along these lines: ***Cherish every moment; it all goes so fast.***

Honestly, I pretty much discarded this one as obvious and irrelevant to me. I mean after all, I'm a motivational speaker for

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crying out loud; it's the same sort of advice I've dished out for years. I concluded that the givers of this advice all meant well, but clearly didn't know how I roll.

Well, just the other day, after completing the major work-related items on my to-do list for the day, I decided to relieve Kim and assume the Lucy-related caregiving duties so she could rest. Lucy and I nestled into our glider, where she promptly ate several ounces and drifted off to sleep. I sat there for a few moments, soaking in the silence. I could barely believe my good fortune that she had fallen asleep so quickly. I could now check even more things off my to-do list! Just as I was about to set her down on the couch to continue her slumber, it hit me:

Oh my gosh. I'm doing it. I'm missing some of the best moments.

Like being hit by a ton of bricks, I was reminded that there will always be e-mail to be checked and tasks to be done, but the opportunities to hold this sleeping little angel grow fewer each day.

We all have work to be done and responsibilities that need to be taken care of, but like I said, I had already accomplished the main goals for the day. I discovered that it is a slippery slope which leads from responsible productivity to the trap of getting

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sucked into a never-ending quest to GET STUFF DONE.

Adultitis is a sinister foe, and no one is immune. Our fast-paced culture has tricked us into believing that we should always be busy, always be “doing” something. We confuse the **urgent** with the **important**. We unwittingly turn irrelevant tasks into priorities simply because they can be checked off some list. Because we somehow feel guilty and unproductive if we spend too much time doing...nothing.

And therein lies the rub, my friend. **Doing nothing isn't really doing nothing.** Holding my baby girl while she sleeps and soaking in a quiet moment might not be decreasing the messages in my inbox any. But it's certainly not “nothing.”

Quite the contrary. Taking the time to do nothing once in a while — especially with the people we love — is often the single most important thing we can do in an entire day.

I know that years from now, when I am giving Lucy away on her wedding day, I will not remember any of the “productive” things I did this week. But the images of her button nose, bald head, pursed lips and peaceful slumber will remain with me forever. My goal is that on that day, which I know will be here before I know it, I won't waste any time wishing that I would have spent more time doing nothing. ❄️

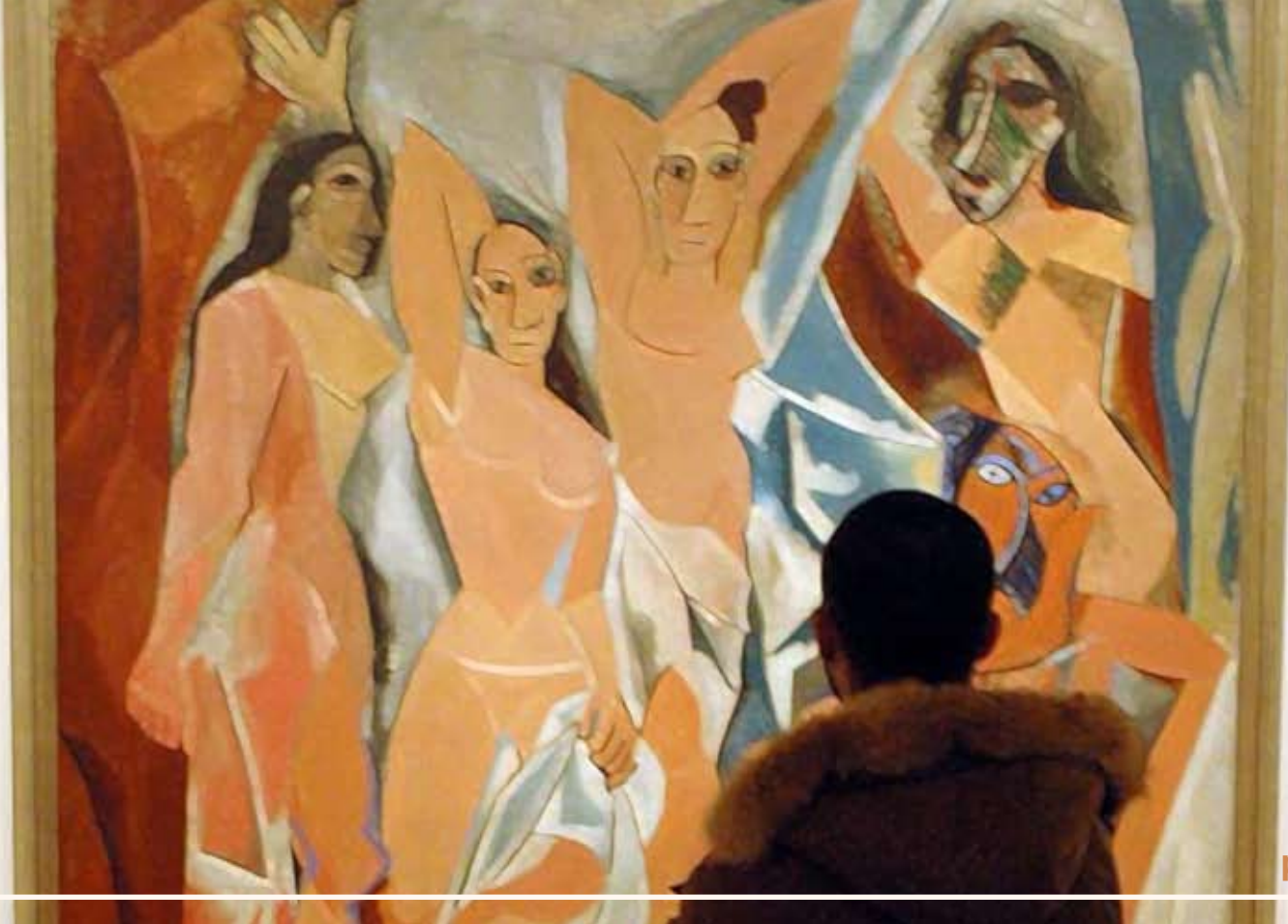


photo by [limonada](#)

How To Experience More By Doing Less

by Jason

We live in a culture of more. We are conditioned to want more stuff, sure, but also to be involved in more and more activities. Our schedules are bursting with everything from meetings, extracurriculars, and charitable activities to projects, practices, and parties of all kinds, including birthdays, baptisms, weddings and showers.

And of course, we can't say no, for fear that we will appear selfish, offend somebody, or cripple our children's chance of get-

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ting into Harvard or the NBA. Sometimes it's as simple as not wanting to miss out on something fun. Having to say yes to all of these things or be crushed under the weight of our own guilt is a rule that doesn't exist.

I get caught up in it myself. I'm prone to wonder (and often doubt) if I'm sucking all the marrow out of life, saying yes to enough things, and collecting enough experiences.

Am I living my life to the fullest?

Then I stumbled across some writings by Thomas Merton, which suggested a few things I've intuitively known all along. In his book *No Man Is An Island*, Merton wrote:

We do not live more fully merely by doing more, seeing more, tasting more, and experiencing more than we ever have before. On the contrary, some of us need to discover that we will not begin to live more fully until we have the courage to do and see and taste and experience much less than usual.

A tourist may go through a museum with a (travel guide), looking conscientiously at everything important, and come out less alive than when he went in. He has looked at everything and seen nothing. He has done a great deal and it has only made him tired. If he stopped for a moment to look at one picture

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he really liked and forgotten about all the others, he might console himself with the thought that he had not completely wasted his time. He would have discovered something not only outside himself but in himself.

Merton offers advice that seems to fly in the face of conventional wisdom. Live more fully by experiencing less?

He's right, though, isn't he? How often do people return from vacations more tired than when they left, pining for another vacation just to recover? That's because we try to cram way too much into our getaways. Like Merton's museum visitor, we are convinced that we must do and see and taste everything (or at least as much as is superhumanly possible.)

How much richer would a visit to New York City be if instead of running around trying to see every single famous landmark, you spent an entire day immersed in the Ellis Island experience, or putzing around lazily in Central Park?

I also love this quote from Merton: "Everything depends on the quality of our acts and our experiences. A multitude of badly performed actions and experiences only half-lived exhausts and depletes our being."

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We engage in far too many badly performed actions, if you ask me. Rushing through dinner so we can get our kids to practice on time. Lunch with a friend spent distracted by texting and checking voice mail messages. Spending our time watching the penguins at the zoo thinking about what four exhibits we should go see next.

This idea of simplifying your life by doing less is the key to finding peace and happiness. It may be the message that this current generation needs to hear more than anything. Loyal readers know that this is something we try to advocate on our web site. But there are a number of other great resources out there as well. Some of my personal favorites include [Zen Habits](#), [Zen Family Habits](#), [Man Vs. Debt](#), [Exile Lifestyle](#), and [The Happiness Project](#). Each of these sites do a great job of challenging me to take a hard look at my own life and discover what areas might benefit from a little downsizing and simplification.

I think Merton was right on. We will not begin to live more fully until we have the courage to do and see and taste and experience much **less** than usual. ✨



The Root of the Problem

by Kim

How old were you when you did your first stress-relieving deep breathing exercise? The NBC station in Charleston, SC did a story on the way a local middle school is reacting to the stress levels of their students. They now provide weekly announcements which include deep breathing and positive thinking exercises.

Students of every age are feeling pressure too from high homework loads, to overscheduled days. Cardiologist Dr. John Kennedy says 'we all have stress in our lives so if you

it's time
to say no to
some things

can teach kids to manage it early, we can protect them from the chronic problems of stress later in life.'

Agree?

Sure. Kids should learn how to react to the stress they are feeling. I have no doubt that today's average middle schooler is quite stressed. Teaching kids to manage stress early is quite a good idea.

Here's my problem...

This "solution," although helping the short-term, is like putting gum on a crack in the Hoover Dam. Simply not going to cut it!

You have to go to the root of the problem to eliminate the stressors now before they linger into adulthood. It comes down to lifestyle choices... and honestly, much of this comes down to whether or not parents are setting adequate limits AND consistently enforcing them. How many extracurricular activities are these stressed kids enrolled in? I've heard (again and again) the argument that kids should participate in a variety of things so that they will be well-rounded and have the opportunity to explore new interests that will help them later in life, but if the kids are feeling stressed by their schedule, then the negative effects are outweighing the positive. It's time to say no to some things.

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Then there's the homework issue. I think schools are overloading kids with homework. Not every school and not every teacher, but I know it's happening. I saw it when I was teaching. There's nothing worse than homework that is "busy work"... the thematic crossword puzzles, the school projects that have very little meaning behind them. There's something to be said for maximizing the seven daytime hours that are already spent in the classroom. It's like we're training kids to be workaholics, telling them that their daytime work is not enough, that they must also work into the evening. What a strange message to send.

Overall stability in the family is also a key element for a stress-free childhood. Stability comes in many forms. Are the parents frequently stressed? Are they able to eat dinner together with their family on a regular basis? Are they getting a solid night of sleep? How much time are they playing video games, on the phone, or on the computer? Are they able to watch anything they want on TV, being exposed to all of the societal crap that leads to enhanced peer pressure and self-consciousness? They have enough "reality" in the halls of their school, without being influenced by the crap on shows like *Rock of Love* or *America's Next Top Model*.

No, it's not healthy to shelter kids or force to live a 1950s life in this naturally fast-paced culture. However, I think many kids

suffering from stress (Juvenile Adultitis) are missing out on the best parts of being a kid and are being forced to grow up way to quickly.

What do you think? ✂



Why The Rush?

by Jason

Our lives are busy. Busy, busy, busy! In fact, isn't it true that we use busyness as a badge of honor? As in:

“How's it going, Bob?”

“Great Stan. I've been really busy.”

“That's good, Bob.”

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Meanwhile, Stan thinks to himself, “Bob is quite successful. He’s a real go-getter. Every time I see him, he seems really busy.”

It’s as if whoever can prove they’re the busiest wins (although I’m not sure *what*). It’s rare that anyone bothers to ask what someone is busy doing. And it’s rarer still that anyone would ever admit, “I haven’t been very busy at all. I’m just taking life as it comes, enjoying it one moment at a time.” In his insightful blog, marketing maven Seth Godin offered [this bit of honest perspective](#):

Last week, I was running from one meeting to another in the city when I passed an old friend on the street. “No time to talk, sorry!” I said as I hustled off.

When we connected by email a bit later, he said he hoped I had a good meeting, and that it was worth the hustle.

I couldn’t remember where I had been headed.

It seemed important at the time.

Sometimes we need to slow down and realize that the things we think are super urgent—the things that keep us oh so busy—really aren’t. ✂



No Magic Elixir for Adultitis

by Jason

As I write this, Lucy is a freshly-minted five-month-old. I'm not sure if it seems like it's been that long or not; the first few weeks were such a blur. I've started noticing how big she's gotten when I see younger babies. I was shocked at church the other day when I saw a newborn cradled in the arms of her mother sitting in front of me. "There's no way Lucy was ever that small!" I thought. And yet I know she was.

There's something about having kids that really lets you know

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how much time flies, and that it's NOT on your side. When it was just me and Kim, time seemed to go by much slower. Sure, there were a few grey hairs that popped up, but there weren't many other markers constantly reminding us of the passage of time.

Not like seeing an infant grow up before your eyes.

It's one thing to preach the importance of appreciating every moment, but it's another thing to live it. It's not like Math or History. Once you know that 2 plus 2 equals 4, or that George Washington was the first American president, you pretty much got it. It's there in your brain, and you don't have to keep reminding yourself about it. But life is so fast, so busy, and so prone to distraction that it's easy to get swept away for days, weeks, or even years at a time before you slow down to take stock and keep first things first.

You can know the importance of it – you can even preach it from the pulpit – but unless you commit to taking the daily action of living it out, it's as if you didn't really know it at all. It might even be worse, because once you wake up to the reality of wasted time and missed opportunities, you realize that you knew better.

There's no pill to take to remedy Adultitis. No surgery or magic

elixir. It takes habit, strengthened each day by a consistent desire to see with new eyes, appreciate the little things, and maintain perspective.

Don't rest on your knowledge about what's important in your life; make sure your actions match up. It's hard, but worth every minute. And it's certainly less painful than the regret of not doing it when you had the chance.

P.S. Looking for a tangible plan to take those daily steps against Adultitis? Try this. ✂



Stressed-out Families

by Kim

Jason shared an alarming number in [a blog post](#): 38.5. That is the average number of minutes parents spend in conversation with their children each week. Yikes. December 5th is “[Communicate With Your Kids Day!](#)” Just the fact that they had to make a day encouraging people to do this says a lot. I was inspired to explore this subject a step further.

If the number 38.5 seems low to you, consider this example of a typical day in the life of a busy family, offered by Frank Coetzee:

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with their
children

“Ok, get up, get dressed, grab some breakfast, brush your hair, the bus is coming, have a nice day, love you, bye.” The note read, “Hi honey how was your day? I have to work until 4:30 today, I’ll be home soon. Grab a snack and get started on your homework. I’ll take you to basketball practice when I get there. Remember, no TV until your homework is done.”

“Hi squirt, I’m home. Grab your gym bag, we’re running late. Ok, I’m just going to drop you off here. Your father will pick you up when you’re done, then it’s a quick bite to eat, a shower and straight to bed. You have another busy day tomorrow.”

Does that sound familiar? As Jason shared in his blog, it’s not a mystery to see what we’re choosing to spend our time on: work, extra curricular activities, tv, homework, video games, the Internet.

According to Business Week online, the average person spends 1.1 hours a day checking email.

The results from an American Time Use Survey reported that the average adult watched 2.6 hours of TV per day. Socializing (in general, not just within the family) accounted for only 45 minutes of the average adult’s day.

Just by using our common sense, we know that it’s important to eat dinner together as a family. Logically, statistics are showing

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that this 15-20 minutes a day spent as a family will lower drug use, raise grades and prevent misbehavior. In Jason's speaking programs for families, he stresses the importance of family dinners because it's such a lost art these days, amidst our busy lifestyles. When I was growing up, we had dinner together every single night. No question. We would talk about our days, laugh, and reconnect. It was a very predictable and safe part of my day. It's obvious that kids need that, but adults do too.

I found an interesting article that was originally published in the early 1900's, called Family Conversation. It says,

"The family should be the most closely knit group to which you belong, and the conversation at home, especially if it includes persons of varied ages and interests, should be interesting and stimulating to every member of the family.

Newton D. Baker is credited with saying that the dinner table conversations at home have a great deal to do with the way the next generation will think and act. If you are a parent, ask yourself seriously whether you have set a standard of family conversation that inspires and stimulates every member of your family group."

If we are only spending 38.5 minutes of time conversing each other out of the 10,080 minutes we have in each week, then

take back
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dinner table
take back your
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are we really choosing to make our families the “most closely knit group” in our lives? Are we finding our family conversations to be “interesting and stimulating?” Probably not, or else we would be making more time for them.

When I was teaching we would often talk about kids who are “at-risk.” That’s quite the buzz word in schools. The fact is this... **today’s families are at-risk.** We need to reclaim our place in society as the most solid, “most closely knit group.” Let’s face it, I think our local Chamber of Commerce groups are beating the average family in terms of amount of time spent communicating and working together as a unit. Jason and I are dedicated to this cause and I know we are not alone.

This week, try to take back your family dinner table, take back your conversations, and truly enjoy the family you’ve been blessed with. If your kids have left the nest, then try to encourage a stressed-out family you know to do some of these important things.

Let’s leave 38.5 in the dust. ✂



Balancing Act: How To Stay Sane in a Fast-Paced World

by Jason

I was at a restaurant recently, slurping down a smoothie and surfing the web. I overheard some guy on a cell phone. I guessed he was a businessman, because we was in a suit and was wearing an air of extreme importance. He was talking rather loudly, apparently assuming – incorrectly, I might add – that everyone in the place was keenly interested in his conversation and wanted to be kept in the loop.

Naturally, I eavesdropped on his conversation. Not that I wanted to, mind you, but the volume of his voice seemed to tell me

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that I'd better pay attention because there was going to be a quiz. I don't remember much of the conversation – good thing there wasn't a quiz – except for the typical exchange of pleasantries. The part I remember went something like this: “Blah blah blah... yeah, things are good, really, really busy... blah blah blah.”

At that moment, like the sight of a 75-year-old man in a pair of leather pants, it struck me.

The purpose of life.

Perhaps you already know this, and forgive me for coming late to the party, but apparently, the purpose of life is to stay extremely and unrelentingly busy. If we are not busy, something must be wrong. Either we are lazy or unimportant. In either case, if we're not busy, our life has gone seriously off track.

Maybe talking about how busy we are is just a mindless expression we use when engaged in small talk. But in this conversation, it was used as a justification. As proof that things were indeed as good as the guy said they were. Proof that he was the master of his life; a success.

I wonder about that. Is he really in control of his life? How can we even tell? Think about the merry-go-round you may have

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played on at the park as a child. You got on, able to convince someone bigger than you to push you around on that thing as fast as he (or she) could. As you held on for dear life, certain that you were teetering on the edge of time travel, things were pretty good. Everything was going by in a blur, and you focused on holding on tight. You were...busy. But were you in control? Could you have gotten off at any time of your choosing?

Not unless you wanted to end up in a tree somewhere in another county.

Perhaps a good measuring stick to gauge whether or not you are really in control of things is if you can get off this merry-go-round called life at a moment's notice without suffering a major case of vertigo.

Why is that important? Because if your life is moving ahead at breakneck speed, it's nearly impossible to notice the little things and maintain a sense of perspective. On the merry-go-round of life, everything is one big blur. You can't even see the flowers, let alone smell them. You're missing other opportunities life has to offer, like the slide, and the swings, and the concession stand. Your stomach is telling you that something is not quite right, but you ignore it, pretending that everything is fine. And in the busy life – just like on the merry-go-round – the tendency is to become very self-absorbed. The main objective is to hold on

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tight, which is fine, because it's awfully hard to carry on a conversation with someone when you're threatening to break the sound barrier.

I'm not sure how or why we as a culture have come to equate busyness with success and being in control. But I do know this: if you catch yourself in a conversation, proudly telling other people how busy you are, you are experiencing a warning sign of Adultitis.

Many people live lives that are seriously out of balance. Rather than do something to fix it, they brag about it to their friends. "I've been putting in sixty hour weeks at the office, I don't know when the last time I had a day off was!"

"I hear ya. I've been running the kids back and forth to so many things, I've been eating most of my meals in the van!"

Clap. Clap. Clap.

That's me applauding the idiocy of our situation. So much time is spent bragging about how busy our lives are, competing in a never-ending game of "Who's Life is Most Out of Whack?" that a life out-of-balance seems normal. Even expected.

And yet deep down, you just wanna get off the merry-go-round.

saying no
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You know there's more to life than falling into bed at night dizzy from the blur that was your day.

Well, you're right. There is a natural balance to creation. Day and night. Winter and summer. Work and play. You were meant to fit into that natural balance. The first step is to realize that you have control over your life. You are not the victim of outside circumstances thrust upon you. Your life is the result of every single one of the choices you've made up until now.

If you want your life to change, and be more in balance, you need to start making different choices in order to see a different result.

It's easy to want to say yes to every good opportunity and offer that comes our way – and hard to say no. But as my friend Eliz Greene says, “Saying no to one thing allows you to say an emphatic yes to something more important.” We only have 24 hours in a day. Allowing your kids to be in too many activities – as enjoyable as they may be – is going to result in less relaxed family time (wolfing down fast food in the van on the way to soccer practice doesn't count, by the way) which produces a family that slowly grows apart.

Working overtime on a regular basis is going to result in resentment and a breakdown in the relationship with your spouse and

what would
your perfect
day look like?

children, no matter how nice a home or trendy the video game system your late nights at the office affords them.

Kim and I have friends who have modeled this idea by taking back their Sundays. Sunday is now a sacred family day for them. They get up, go to church, and return home for a lunch of leftovers from the week. (No cooking for Mom!) The afternoon is spent lounging, napping, and playing games together as a family. They order in pizza for dinner and might watch some TV... together. As you might imagine, they've had to say no to a lot of appealing invitations from friends and family, as well church and community events. But ever since they've decided to reclaim Sunday for themselves, everyone in the family has been affected. They treasure Sunday. Even the kids look forward to it all week. The decision to say "no" to the good in order to say "yes" to the great has ushered in a new level of balance, and everyone in the family is better equipped to tackle the rest of the week with enthusiasm.

Another technique you can use to bring your life into balance is to write out your perfect day. Not necessarily some imaginary day in the future when you've accomplished all of your dreams, but your ideal, ordinary work day. Would you eat breakfast? Go for a walk? Spend some quiet time praying or meditating? How many hours would you work? What would you do for dinner? How would you spend your evening: chatting with a friend?

you have
been created
for great
things

playing a game with the kids? indulging in a quiet bubble bath before bed?

Write out your perfect day. It'll never happen unless you know what it looks like. Then start making choices that will help make your perfect day a reality. Remember, you have the power to change your circumstances by changing the choices you make. Of course, every day presents a new set of unplanned challenges, but the more effort you put into modeling your day after your "perfect" day, the happier and more in balance you will be. Life is fast enough. Don't abdicate your power to engineer the direction of your life by making thoughtless decisions – or by having them made for you. Don't get so busy that you find yourself missing the treasure of a quiet night at home with your family. Or the opportunity to use a rainy afternoon for a movie and a nap. Or the joy of seeing your child grow up.

Our lives are not meant for aimless wandering and lazy habits. You have been created for great things. Things that will only be accomplished through hard work, determination, and persistence. But let's stop trying to impress people with how fast you're going on the merry-go-round. When you think of how much you're missing out on, it's not really all that impressive. ✨



Capture the Clarity

by Kim

Jason and I got the chance to sneak away recently for a weekend of warmth to Ft. Myers, Florida. There's nothing better than putting lotion on your sunburned cheeks while watching The Weather Channel report that your home zip code is getting pounded with several inches of white stuff.

I was motivated to check another thing off the life list before the year ended, so when the opportunity arose for us to go parasailing, I jumped on it. Jason recalled that he had it on his life list

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to not only parasail, but to parasail in the Gulf of Mexico. So it was meant to be! Before we knew it, we were on a boat stepping into harnesses with cheezy grins on our faces.

Anyone who has had this thrilling experience will attest that it is actually quite peaceful, which is not what I was expecting. Not that I thought it'd be like water skiing, but I did think it would be a little more frightening on my own scale of scary. It was not. I'm guessing it is similar to a hot air balloon ride.

For those 15 minutes, the clock stopped, the rotation of the earth came to a screeching halt, and all possible traces of anxiety and stress were left on the ground with my sandals and sunscreen.

The coolest thing is that about three minutes into it, after Jason pointed out the three dolphins below us (so cool!), I became very self-aware, knowing that I needed to “capture” this feeling of clarity to come back to later when inevitably, life would not be this stress-free. So, I breathed deep and made a conscious effort to absorb and appreciate the magnificent beauty all around me, the perfect breeze through my toes, the salty smell of the ocean, the sounds of seagulls and distant music from the shore, and my smiling husband right next to me... does life get any better?

create a
moment to
capture

That “capture” served me well during the weeks following our trip. I returned to that capture when I helped push our car out of the frozen snow and ice at the airport when we arrived back home. I returned to that capture a handful of nights in bed, as I instinctively resorted to worry, thinking of the to-do list for the next day, knowing there just weren’t going to be enough hours to get it all done. I returned to that capture in line at Wal-Mart, after I realized I had picked the wrong line, once again. I returned to that capture as I called to cancel our credit card which had been stolen. And I returned to that capture when I finished giving our mechanic \$900, just six days before Christmas.

No doubt, the busyness of each day creates more stress and strain in our already crazy lives. Create a moment for yourself to capture, something to be able to go back to when Adultitis takes over. Whether it’s lying under the stars with your kids, or taking a peaceful drive to appreciate a sunny day, those moments of clarity will serve you well! ❄️



While You Were Busy, Life Passed By

by Jason

Last week, I enjoyed a nice vacation in Door County with the fam. We rented a house that was just big enough for the eleven of us: Mom, Dad, my brothers' families, Kim and me. We roasted marshmallows, fished for salmon, gazed at the stars, played mini golf, sampled wine, sat on the beach, and ate lots of cherry-related products (thumbs up on the cherry barbecue sauce). I also did something I haven't done in years: I didn't check email or surf the internet once.

the sun
still rose
and set on a
regular basis
and the
business
didn't crumble
to the ground

Somehow, the world continued to rotate on its 23.5-degree axis.

Now, it took some planning and preparation to pull it off. I cleaned up my email inbox, prepped all the web site files, and trained my colleague Jenna to do the updating. I had intended to check email mid-week, but once I got a taste of living low tech, that goal didn't take long to evaporate. It was a relaxing week.

And now for emphasis: the sun still rose and set on a regular basis and the business didn't crumble to the ground.

Hmphf. It all makes me wonder why I place such a high degree of urgency and importance on checking my email so many times a day. There were plenty of internet cafés I could've visited to "stay connected." (Or in other words, "stay distracted.") But then I might have missed out on playing catch with my brother, talking about our hopes and dreams. I might have missed out on the spirited game of Disney® Uno with my nieces. Or the refreshing walk with my bride amidst a green cathedral of pine trees.

Our world is connected like never before. And all of our technological advancements are supposed to give us more time. Instead, we fall for the temptation of trying to pack more tasks into the time we've saved.

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busy

I heard a saying once that if the devil can't make you bad, he'll make you busy.

Adultitis thrives in all this busyness. And all this busyness tricks us into feeling like we're productive. When we feel productive, we think we're actually getting something accomplished. And when we think we're getting something accomplished, we are fooled into believing that our work is not only obligatory, but indispensable.

Here's what's really happening: life is passing us by.

We miss out on the important stuff because we're convinced that the busyness is standard operating procedure. And we're deceived by the mirage that someday, if we work hard enough, our to-do list will be cleared. As David Allen reminds us in *Getting Things Done*, you will die with things STILL on your to-do list.

This never-ending hamster wheel is the part of adulthood we need to escape from now and then. As difficult as it may seem, we need to unplug ourselves from the daily grind. To think it's not possible is not only wrong, it's flat out foolish. If your situation is really bad (like checking-your-cell-phone-for-messages-every-minute-on-the-minute bad), perhaps you should consider

what will you miss?

an all-out “tech sabbatical.”

These are the questions you need to seriously ask yourself: Do you really need to work extra to afford that latest gadget? Will life cease to exist if you don't check your email three times before breakfast? What's the worst that will happen if you don't answer your cell phone while you're having lunch with a friend?

Can you detach yourself from busyness for an hour a day? A day a week? A week every three months?

Here's the biggie: **What will you miss if you don't?** ✨

Make a choice.
Make a change.
Make your life better.

Kim & Jason

Thanks for reading. If this ebook floated your boat, you may find these other resources helpful.

Books

Escape Adulthood: 8 Secrets from Childhood for the Stressed-Out Grown-Up

The Escape Plan: A 40-day Guide for Annihilating the Adultitis In Your Life

There's An Adult In My Soup

Free Newsletter

Kim & Jason Insider: A Weekly jolt of happiness for your inbox, featuring tips, blog highlights, comics and inside info.

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