

Great Work
Crazy Busy Week 1: Nehemiah 6
July 30, 2017

Welcome/intro/vision

Picked a great week to join us, starting a brand new series this morning called “Crazy Busy”

We actually did a Crazy Busy series 3 years ago as we rounded the corner into August 2014 and it so resonated with so many of us that as we were brainstorming series options we decided to revisit this topic

Now we stole this title from a great book that we have on our book table, called, of course, “Crazy Busy” I’d highly suggest you pick it up
it’s a short and easy and quick read that a number of people still cite three years later as a book that made a profound difference in how they think about their lives and priorities and their schedule

A couple things happen as soon as I say the phrase “Crazy Busy”—first off, everyone knows exactly what we’re talking about, right?

This is not a mysterious, esoteric, theologically confusing phrase that we’re going to need to go to great lengths to understand!

For many of us, this is the state of our lives! And for some of you, even just saying the phrase crazy busy makes the muscles knot up in your shoulders and makes your stomach tense

Many of us are totally familiar and fluent with Crazy Busy—it’s not even a season for many of us, it’s a lifestyle

In fact, so many of us are so used to being Crazy Busy that we can’t even begin to imagine NOT being Crazy Busy

And in fact, we get so used to Crazy Busy that we start to think that’s how life should be, some of us can even get defensive around our Crazy Busy

Some of you might say: “I LIKE being crazy busy! It gives me something to do! I hate being bored!” Totally get it, I hate being bored, too.

We’re not going to advocate going from Crazy Busy to Crazy Bored! MAYBE, just MAYBE there’s something in between that would be more life-giving than EITHER Crazy Busy OR Crazy Bored

Let me introduce you to a phrase: **Stockholm Syndrome**

In 1973 four people were held hostage in a bank in Stockholm for SIX days being toyed with and tortured and after it was all over NONE of the hostages would testify against them and instead they raised money for their defense

Psychologists then coined the phrase Stockholm Syndrome as ***a condition that causes hostages to develop a psychological alliance with their captors as a survival strategy during captivity.***

This morning, as we kick off a 3 week series talking about Crazy Busy, my goal is to help many of us be set free from Crazy Busy Stockholm Syndrome

To help us to see how Crazy Busy is holding so many of us hostage and captive from the life that we were designed to live

a life that's full of real joy rather than just soundbites and skirting around the edges, racing from one thing to the next

One of the many practical applications of a fully integrated, real-time faith is Rescue from first world, crazy busy malaise.

Purpose, meaning, and focus in place of race around, get a lot of stuff, do a lot of stuff, meaninglessness.

Now before we get into this, I want to acknowledge something that is particular to where we live and who's here

While much of American Culture is caught up in Crazy Busy-land, there is a good number of people who live in Chatham County precisely to ESCAPE living a Crazy Busy life

Some of you have grown up here and never been interested in the urban or suburban, frantic, racing around that marks so many people's lives in our culture

Others of you DIDN'T grow up here but you moved here on purpose in order to have somewhere between 2-200 acres and no neighbors and lots of room and space and margin—even if you have to commute 30 minutes to a job full of suckers living in cul-de-sacs in Cary or Durham

Some of you have gone to great lengths to cultivate a life that is unhooked from the frenetic-ness of the larger culture

You're often not quite so easily enticed by all the stuff that and activities that captivate those Crazy Busy people

and I want to start this series by congratulating you on un-hooking or never getting hooked into the Crazy Busy life

And the kinds of people who make those kinds of against the grain decisions are often fiercely independent and have the spiritual gift of stubbornness and not caring what anyone else thinks about them

So instead of calling you Crazy Busy, I'm going to suggest a better title for you might be **Crazy Indy**. You're crazy independent, and you know who you are! Come back to you in a minute!

And on the other hand, we've got a good number of retirees who are here

And some of you USED to be Crazy Busy but you have unhooked from all of that now!
Or at least have swapped out the stress of a day-job for the stress of deciding which hobby
you're going to do today

OR some of you have traded out a full-time paying job for a new one—I never knew that
grandparenting could be a full-time job until I saw some of you doing it!

Some of you are **Crazy Retiree**. And many of you have more choices and for some of you that's
meant that you're a bit less Crazy Busy than you used to be when you were working

So whether you're Crazy Busy, Crazy Indy, or Crazy Retiree, what we're going to talk about
today and over these next few weeks applies to you.

And even though we're calling this series Crazy Busy, I want to invite your Crazy Indy's
and Crazy Retiree's to be a part of it.

Because as different as these three might all look on the outside, once you dig down into the
core of where or how it goes wrong

you start to see that at the core of it there's a number of strikingly similar dysfunctional
motives at work that we've become captive to that we're going to see in just a few minutes

We're going to start today by looking at Nehemiah 6. If you were with us back in February, we
talked about the first few chapters of Nehemiah

If you've joined us more recently, the story of Nehemiah is from the Old Testament and
it's written about a time when the people of Israel were a conquered people and the city of
Jerusalem was in ruins

Nehemiah is hundreds of miles away in captivity and he hears about the fact that the walls of
the city were still burned down over 100 years after they had initially been conquered

This means that the city is very vulnerable

But also the burned out wall is an emblem of their shame as a people--they don't even
have a wall up around their capital city!

So Nehemiah weeps and fasts and prays and incredibly he gets permission from the king to go
back to Jerusalem to re-build the wall around the city

So Nehemiah travels hundreds of miles across the desert and rallies the people of
Jerusalem to get to work and there's great stuff happening

But throughout the story there are a couple of characters from neighboring cities who have
attempted to thwart the rebuilding project or intimidate or distract the people from doing the
work

And in Nehemiah 6:1, this incredible reconstruction effort is ALMOST DONE but the enemies of the Jews hear about it and here's what happened:

Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates),² Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm.

Have you ever made an important decision to make a change

Only to find that it felt like the whole world was conspiring against your ability to deliver on said resolution or change?

You resolve to eat healthier, ice cream immediately goes on sale at the grocery store! Those evil people at the grocery store are conspiring against you getting healthy!

You resolve to get out more often and exercise regularly and it rains for 4 week straight!

Or perhaps more seriously, you resolve to break out of an unhealthy family dynamic or break out of an unhealthy relationship or to break an unhealthy addiction or making better and more honest decisions at work

And the people around you literally go out of their way to try to keep you from getting healthier and making better decisions

Because if YOU get healthier, they feel what? Threatened, left behind, anxious

When we're doing something that really matters, we're going to face **opposition from any number of these three directions: intra-personal (the voices in our own heads), situational (circumstances) or interpersonal (enemies).**

Nehemiah has uprooted his whole life, traveled hundreds of miles across the desert to rebuild this wall around Jerusalem, he has rallied a dispirited people to a major task

And so of course, there is real opposition. Sanballat and Geshem are these two men who have plagued this whole project and attempted to thwart it all along

Now I realize I haven't yet told you what's *wrong* with being Crazy Busy—some of you know it's a problem intuitively already you just don't know what else to do

others of you are still clinging to your Stockholm Syndrome experience

But to start with, I want to ask you to consider that just hypothetically, if you were going to change, if you were going to make some different decisions around time

what do you expect your opposition to look like?

In any change that really matters, there will at some points be significant opposition.

it's helpful to start to anticipate it and then pre-decide how you're going to respond or navigate or overcome that opposition

And in response to HIS experience of opposition, Nehemiah says one of my favorite lines in the whole Bible,

³ And I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?" ⁴ And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.

Just over 5 years ago I started working here—for the first 2 years I was the only employee of the church, not only was I the lead pastor, I was also the lead janitor and secretary!

And the church was in significant transition. There had been a falling out with the first pastor and his associate, and the elder team had worked tirelessly to care for the church after they left

And things were healthier than they could have been for sure, but it was still a seriously transitional time for the church

And I had just left an organization I had been with for 16 years that worked with college students and I had lots of friends there

And in my first couple of months here, I would occasionally get emails inviting me to speak at an event or on campus or be a part of a task force

And a month or two into my time here, I got an email from a friend of mine who had a thriving campus ministry up in Virginia: "Alex, come up here and be our speaker at one of our first meetings in a couple of weeks. I will pay you."

There were a lot of things to love about this email! A great guy, old friend, I loved being with college students, I love to travel occasionally, I love speaking and teaching, it's always nice to be wanted and of course it's nice to get paid: Jackpot!

But I looked around and took stock of where I was, certain that God had put me here, and at all the work that I knew needed to happen to get this back fully on track

And I took a deep breath and I wrote in response: "Dear Derek. Thanks so much for your email. I'd love to come speak there sometime. But I am doing a great work here and I cannot come down."

And just like Nehemiah, I had to re-write that again and again and again as I would occasionally get invitations during that first year especially to go places that would take me away from here and what I knew my great work was during that season.

"I am doing a great work and I cannot come down." Would you repeat that with me?

Sometimes you've got to say that, just like Nehemiah did. And just like Nehemiah, sometimes you need to say it over and over again.

In order to pursue your God-given great work, you need to make ONE good decision and then you need to make MORE THAN just one good decision; you need to string together a series of good decisions.

And your wildly important take-home question this week way early in the message that we're going to talk about and build on for next week is simply this:

What is your great work in this season?

This is the question for you today not just if you're Crazy Busy, this is also for you if you're a Crazy Indy or a Crazy Retiree: what is your great work in this season?

But here's especially why Crazy Busy is not your friend, why in fact it's holding you hostage, and why you should seriously consider doing the work required to fight against Crazy Busy, as difficult as it is to do so

The Scripture essentially outline Six Great Works that we're to be about over the course of our lifetimes. If you're not a Jesus person or a Bible person, some of these might not naturally resonate but hopefully at least a couple of them will.

There are essentially six great works that you could say that the Scriptures call us to over the course of our lives:

- **Worship**
- **Character**
- **Relationships**
- **Mission**
- **Work**
- **Rest**

It would have been great to make that spell some sort of an acronym but I needed to buy a vowel and I couldn't make it work, so here it is

Let's read them out loud together: worship, character, relationships, mission, work, rest

Six great works that we're to be about over the course of our lives, all of them are in motion all day, every day, nothing static about any of these things, they're constant works in progress in good ways or bad ways.

And at different times in our lives, we have to focus on or be intentional about cultivating, building, or re-building one of these six great works

Worship is what we were made to do—it comes from old English worth-ship, to hold something in high worth or regard, even as ULTIMATE worth, THE most important thing, to put something or someone at the center of our lives and say “this is what matters most”

Worship isn't just something that religious people do, we were made to worship, everyone was made to worship therefore EVERYONE WORSHIPS SOMETHING<

If you're breathing, you're worshipping something whether it's people's approval or your John Deere lawn mower or the God of the universe but far and away the most popular one is simply OURSELVES

my preferences, what makes me comfortable, what I like, that's at the center mostly: me, me, me, and more of me.

Character is who you are, really. Who are you when no one's looking, who are you when everyone around you is going the opposite direction of what is true or right

Who are you when all the props or status or stuff is stripped away and underneath is just you, the person that you've become

Over the course of our lives we are all becoming beings, we're all becoming more alive or less alive, more human or less human

We're becoming more generous hearted and creative and joyful or more cranky and irritable or anxious or proud or jealous or self-absorbed

Relationships are the people around you God has called you to serve and love in order to help one another to flourish: spouse, kids, extended family, friends, neighbors, co-workers

Two weeks ago when we talked about the TOGETHER that God has made possible through the gospel

If you were too Crazy Busy to be here two weeks ago, you should totally go back and check that message out!

Mission is kingdom mission, using your gifts and abilities and opportunities to participate in God's eternal work to bring healing and redemption, grace and truth to a broken and weary world in real-time

We believe that you have God-given gifts to make a you-shaped difference in this world. Not for the sake of your OWN name but for the sake of God's kingdom and his purposes.

Sometimes that happens in and through our relationships or our work lives, sometimes it's something that's on top of or separate from those things

Work includes any number of things from a paying job to raising kids or grandkids.

Rest and included in here is play, is the willingness to embrace the fact that there is ONE Messiah and we are not him. We are human and we embrace our limits, even celebrate them

Because it takes a whole lot of pressure off of us when we realize it us not up to us to save the world and/or everyone else around us

Worship, Character, Relationships, Mission, Work, Rest. You do these 6 things with a healthy excellence then you leave a mark in the world, you make a difference in this world, you have a tremendous legacy, you change lives, you leave life in your wake
you have peace in your soul about who you are, who God is, and what you're about—

Whether you're CRAZY BUSY, CRAZY INDY, OR CRAZY RETIREE, these are the buckets that make for a rich and rewarding life—you fill these buckets with joyful healthy excellence, you're the fully human being God intended for us to be

Part of why Jesus is the single biggest impact person in all of global history is because in all six of these areas of life, he not only excelled, he redefined what excellence was!

He's the poster child for what excellence looks like in each of these areas

So here's the key question: ***how many of these six things can you Crazy Busy your way into with excellence?***

The answer is not hard, is it? **Zero.** Not even Jesus attempted to Crazy Busy his way into any of these things and he had a bit of a leg up on each of us!

Let's go bottom-up: you can't Crazy Busy your way into real Rest, rest and Crazy Busy are totally at odds with each other

in fact, if you're a Crazy Busy addict, the idea that rest is even up here as a thing that God designed us and calls us to go to work cultivating is appalling!

But even beyond that, you can't even Crazy Busy your way to excellence in Work!

Steve Tamayo just read a great book called "Deep Work" a business book about the myth of multi-tasking, how much it diminishes us as humans and how much it robs us of doing real good work

He told me I should read it, I was too Crazy Busy so I read the executive summary of it—oh the irony!

It's really good and he's really right. Every piece of research shows that the only way to do excellent work is to do deep work, you can't Crazy Busy your way into excellence at work

You can't Crazy Busy your way into Kingdom Mission—in fact, this is one of the first things to go for many of us when we get Crazy Busy.

We don't have time for any mission except our own in part because when we're Crazy Busy we're too busy and distracted to SEE any one else's mission or purposes other than our own

You can't Crazy Busy your way into any Relationships of any real depth: you can't get to a great marriage through Crazy Busy, you can't do great parenting through Crazy Busy, you can't have real friendships if all you've got is Crazy Busy

You can't Crazy Busy your way into genuine and deep and authentic Character—Crazy Busy is a recipe for fluster and anxiety, not rootedness and depth and integrity.

And you can't Crazy Busy your way into worshiping the God of the universe with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, in spirit and in truth

In fact, this along with mission is usually one of the first things to go for so many of us

And what happens when we get sucked into Crazy Busy is that we drift into a faith statement that our culture totally holds up and celebrates and it looks like this:

Busy = Important. Therefore, if you're busy then you're important.

That's the default faith statement of much of our culture—we want to be important, want to be significant, therefore I fill my life with all kinds of busyness which affirms my importance

That's worship—and who's at the center of this whole equation? What's the pronoun here? "I!"

This is why for some of us taking a hard look at Crazy Busy is so threatening. We matter because we're Crazy Busy. If we're not Crazy Busy, then who are we? Good news, Jesus has a much better answer waiting for you: beloved image-bearer, son or daughter of the most High God, but it requires letting go of Crazy Busy to embrace it

And this Busy = Important thing is why for some of us, transition into retirement is so difficult, because we've been operating under this equation for so long that if you strip away the busy, we worry that we'll lose value—this is a real thing for many retirees, isn't retiree friends?

Meanwhile, Indy's swap out something else for Busy

Independence is what makes Indy's important, and there are all these proofs that you've got it:

can you change your own oil, do you grow your own food, how big is your garden, what do you grow in your garden, how close are you to getting to be completely not reliable on any other creature on the planet?

Who's at the center of that equation? What's the pronoun there? ME all over again—not such a long trip is it?

We will worship something, most of us will find a way to put ourselves right at the center of it

But these six great works done rightly and healthily OVER THE COURSE OF OUR LIFETIMES make for a GREAT LIFE.

And at points along the way, ONE of these comes front and center and says: this matters most in this season, right now.

For Nehemiah in this story, MISSION and WORK merged together and he had absolute clarity on what his great work was in that season: I'm doing a great work on this wall, and I'm not coming down until it's done.

There was a clarity that came with focus that enabled him to order and organize his work and the rest of his world in this season—wasn't forever, it was just for a time: what's your great work?

[PBO EDIT:] About 7 years ago, Susan Henson in our church stumbled across a problem:
women go to jail pregnant and have to either put their kids in the foster system to bounce around
or send them back to be raised in an environment that they sometimes know wasn't the healthiest for them growing up and it wouldn't be good for their child either

So Susan decided to found Pharaoh's Daughter, a place where women who are incarcerated could leave their kids in a safe, loving environment while they're in jail—awesome.

She started working on this 7 years ago. For 7 years she's prayed and built a board and done fundraising and made contacts and connections and gotten training waited and waited and waited for this thing to come together

And for 7 years, there were other things that came up, distractions and opportunities, some very good opportunities and you know what she kept saying: "I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down."

And a couple of weeks ago, she got the call that she'd been waiting for for 7 years.

There was a pregnant woman in jail who wanted to entrust her child to Pharaoh's Daughter.
And then a day or two later, she got ANOTHER call and another woman also wants to leave her child with Pharaoh's Daughter

Two babies in just a couple of days after 7 years of waiting and working and working and working and working and praying and praying and praying. She brought the first one home Thursday night, Skylar, a whole 2 days old, beautiful—be with Susan until June or so of next year when the mother gets out of prison

She's got another coming in a handful of weeks and meanwhile maybe two more have bubbled up in the past two weeks

We're throwing a baby shower on August 6th as a church, details in your bulletin, come and help support Susan in her great work

Susan's been doing a great work, and she has not come down for 7 years!
Nehemiah was absolutely clear on what his great work was, that kept him from being distracted or lost

What's your great work in this season?

It's going to be in one of these categories: **Worship, Character, Relationships, Mission, Work, Rest**

But as great as Nehemiah was, a couple hundred years later, a greater Nehemiah appeared in the pages of Scripture

And this Nehemiah was sent from his Father to do a uniquely great work, and he was sorely tempted to come down over and over and over again

At one point the Scriptures tell the story of satan himself coming to tempt him, three times he tempted him to come down off of his great work to feed himself, to gather people's attention and acclaim, to be given power over the nations

Three times he said to Satan in various ways: "I'm doing a great work, and I cannot come down."

And then at the end of his life, as he was crucified, bleeding, dying

he said it was necessary, he said it had to happen, for the forgiveness of sins, the redemption of a fallen humanity, a sacrifice had to be made to buy back an enslaved and lost humanity

he'd double checked with God his Father just before it all happened—does it have to go down like this? And it did. So he went. To the cross, to die, for us.

There were people who jeered at him and mocked him and said, "He saved others, why can't he save himself! Come down off that cross if you're the Son of God!"

And you know what he said by his actions? "I'm doing a great work, and I cannot come down." Jesus Christ, the one who towers over all of history in his worship, character, relationships, mission, work, and rest, knew exactly who he was and what he was about

And that clarity is what set his life apart in so many ways: "What is your great work in this season?"

When I first got here, it was work—I was going a great work here at Chatham Community church and I could not come down

For Susan, it's been Mission for the past 7 years—she's been developing Pharaoh's Daughter for 7 years and she could not come down

I've walked alongside people for whom repairing their marriage or their relationships with grown kids or parents was their great work

Others: to break their addiction to alcohol or drugs or pornography before it killed them

These six things make for a great and meaningful life. All of them are in play all the time in our lives

but at different points in our lives at critical moments, we have to climb up on either a broken down wall or just a mission-critical wall

and declare to ourselves and to all the distractions and opposition *say it with me one more time: "I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down."*

What's your great work this season?

Pray