

## Let's Go Deeper...

Wednesday, September 21, 2016

At our weekly staff meeting on Monday afternoon, Michael Rintamaa observed that Sunday's string of nine announcements (which Jimmy Gawne handled ever so nimbly) was followed by our singing of a hymn titled "Come and Find the Quiet Center."

*Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead,  
find the room for hope to enter,  
find the frame where we are freed:  
clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can see  
all the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be.<sup>1</sup>*

We all smiled. How deliciously ironic that we followed a long list of "dos" with a hymn that encouraged us to simply "be." Such is the sabbath day. After a week of checking off all the items on our "To Do" lists at home, work, and school, we pause for a Word from our Sponsor:

*Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead.*

Easier said than done. We're addicted to doing. We're a busy bunch, and proud of it. In an insightful blog post titled "The Disease of Being Busy"<sup>2</sup>, Omid Safi, Director of Duke University's Islamic Studies Center, tells of seeing a friend and asking her how she was doing.

He says she whimpered: "I'm so busy... I have so much going on."

He then ran into another friend and asked him how he was. He got the same tone and response: "I'm just so busy... I've got so much to do."

Then he tells of asking a neighbor if their daughter and his daughter could get together and play. The girl's mother reached for her cell phone and pulled up her calendar. She scrolled... and scrolled... and scrolled. Finally, she said, "She has a 45-minute opening two and half weeks from now. The rest of the time it's gymnastics, piano, and voice lessons. She's just.... so busy."

Dr. Safi asks, "Why so busy? How did we end up living like this? Why do we do this to ourselves? Why do we do this to our children? *When did we forget that we are human beings, not human doings?*"

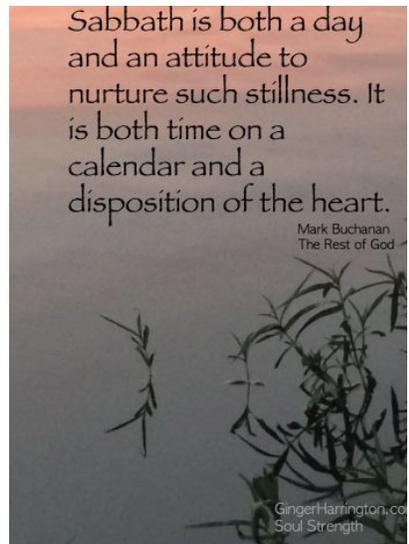
Eugene Peterson suggests, I think rightly, that chronic busyness is symptomatic of vanity. In his words:

"I am busy because I am vain. I want to appear important. Significant. What better way than to be busy? The incredible hours, the crowded schedule, and the heavy demands on my time are proof to myself- and to all who will notice- that I am important.... I live in a society in which crowded schedules and harassed conditions are evidence of importance. I want to be important, so I develop a crowded schedule and harassed conditions. When others notice, they acknowledge my significance and my vanity is fed. The busier I am, the more important I am."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Shirley Erena Murray Words © 1992, 2005 Hope Publishing Company

<sup>2</sup> <http://onbeing.org/blog/the-disease-of-being-busy/7023>

<sup>3</sup> *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*, p. 18



Theologically, that's called "works righteousness." I am righteous—right in the eyes of God and others—because of my works. What I *do*. The more I do, the busier I am, the more *I* am. It follows that if you think your self-worth is tied into your full schedule, you'll do, do, do, until you're done, done, done in.

Jesus lived life differently. Jesus wasn't plagued by the disease of busyness. "In the morning," Mark tells us, "a great while before day, he arose and went to a lonely place to pray" (6:30). He began his day not at work but at rest. Why? I think it's because Jesus knew he was "Beloved of God." Before Jesus *did* anything, God told him, "You are my Beloved." Secure in that knowledge, Jesus didn't have to *busy himself to death*. Rather, he could *rest himself to life*. That is, Jesus began his day *being*—resting in God, not *doing* – busying himself.

John Ortberg, a favorite author and keen observer of modern culture, tells of a spiritual director he consulted once. He described to the man his weekly schedule, his responsibilities, and the general pace of his life and then asked, "What do I need to do to be spiritually healthy?"

The man said, "You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life."

Ortberg responded, "Okay, I've written that one down. That's a good one. What else is there?"

"There is nothing else. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life."

Ortberg then introduces the concept of "hurry sickness," what he defines as "a continuous struggle and unremitting attempt to accomplish more and more things or participate in more and more events in less and less time... Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. Hurry can destroy our souls... For many of us the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them."<sup>4</sup>

I'll be the first to admit I don't have this sabbath thing figured out yet. But I've come a long way. I begin each day with a "sweet hour of prayer" (thirty minutes when I've hit snooze on the alarm once too many times) and I usually carve out margins in my day to recollect myself, center myself, and remember whose I am.

Tuesdays, my sabbath day, are usually marked by that morning prayer time, a leisurely home-cooked breakfast with Jennie, a *very* leisurely three or four mile run, an hour or two of leisure reading, and a sitting in the chair of my upstairs study just pondering. Asking "What if...?" Imagining. Jotting down a few thoughts. Maybe a movie. Maybe go out for dinner. No "have tos." Never busy.

Funny, but Tuesday is the longest day of the week for me. Not longest as in "When will this ever be over?" Rather, longest as in the long time it takes to enjoy a wonderful meal in a lovely restaurant with someone(s) you thoroughly enjoy being with and talking to attended to by a non-obtrusive wait staff who whisper, "Take your time. Enjoy. Don't rush. You've got all the time in the world."

Good thing, because attuned to eternity, I've lost track of time.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Life You've Always Wanted*, Chapter 5