

Draw Near 9

Slowing, April 28

Purpose

The practice of slowing helps me to draw near to God because it better connects me in relationship to people which then improves my relationship to God. I succeed in my loving of people which thus succeeds in my loving God.

Sharing Time

Review Devotionals: Has everyone completed some devotionals from this past week? There is no penalty for not completing them. They are there to help you and guide you. Let's share for a minute what we have learned from those you have done.

Learning Experience

Introduction: A recent survey of 20,000 Christians from 40 countries found 40% say we "often" or "always" rush from task to task. For ministers, that number is 54%. We suffer from "hurry" sickness.

But we all know this - we feel it in our bones:

- Speeding - On the roads, as we walk, as we move about our homes. We are plagued by fear that there are too many to-do's and too few minutes in the day! We talk faster, drive faster, and attempt to work faster.
- Multi-tasking - While driving we are drinking and eating and phoning! When we watch TV we do homework. And when we attempt to do more than one thing at a time we fail. Though brain research it is now proven impossible to do this, all we are doing is "brain-switching" or "attention-switching" which is much more ineffective to our productivity
- Clutter - Do you have multiple to do lists around your house? Do you have stacks of unread magazines? Stacks of unread books? Unfinished projects? Unpaid bills? There are all sorts of clutter and stacks around the house
- Superficiality - We are in a hurry, so we don't talk about issues with people, we just ask, "How are you?" Then we hurry on...
- Lovelessness - People in a hurry don't have time for love - and love takes time - a lot of it. We have to spend time with those we love, yet we are not willing to stop.
- Sunset Fatigue - When we get home at night, we are so tired we have no emotional energy for the family - the people we want to be closest to.

This is called "sunset fatigue" because our emotional tank is empty as we work to develop relationship with those we love the most.

If we want to truly experience what Jesus dreamed for human relationship in the Sermon on the Mount we must get a handle on "hurry" in our lives. To help us do that, take a few minutes now and score yourself from this list. Use the following scale: 1=no trace of this symptom in my life; 2=small and somewhat rare trace; 3=medium and irregular occurrences; 4=medium and regular occurrences of this in my life; 5=this symptom looms large in my life.

Score yourself on the things listed above from - 1-5.

How does Jesus talk about slowing in the Sermon on the Mount?

Matthew 5:13 - "You are the salt of the earth." Salt adds flavor. It adds variety. It has for centuries, millennia. It also keeps things from perishing as fast. Jesus imagines we can be the salt for others, in their lives. Our life can help others to live better lives.

Matthew 5:14 - "You are the light of the world." Light illumines a dark room, dark night. Light warms us. Light encourages us. Here Jesus sees us acting as the light for other people's lives - helping them, encouraging them, warming up their souls.

But one important thing can keep this from happening - hurry. Because we rush from one activity to another, our salt rarely has time to settle in and give taste. Because we move quickly from task to task, our light has no time to illumine in another life. We may be very salty and quite shiny, but if we don't spend enough time in one place, we cannot do the work of salt. We cannot do the work of light.

It would do no good to have one flashlight in an office where the lights have gone out and run from room to room over and over again expecting the quickly moving light to have an impact. That is useless.

If we throw salt from a moving car or moving truck hoping to spread our salt all around, it will do little good, if any, because it is spread too thin.

If we want our salt and light to have an impact on people's lives, we need to slow down. We have to spend time in their lives for this to have marinating time.

Our goal in this Draw Near study is to grow in our spiritual maturity. It is to expand our life in God. Mike Yaconelli offers us these challenging words about a prominent barrier to spiritual growth:

What keeps many of us from growing is not sin but speed.... Spiritual growth is not running faster, as in more meetings, more Bible studies, and more prayer

meetings. Spiritual growth happens when we slow our activity down. If we want to meet Jesus, we can't do it on the run. If we want to stay on the road of faith, we have to hit the brakes, pull over to a rest area, and stop. Christianity is not about inviting Jesus to speed through life with us; it's about noticing Jesus at the rest stop.

In a college class on marriage, a graph was shared revealing results from a study measuring satisfaction among couples throughout the lifetime of their marriage, after they had been married for over 50 years. Across the board it showed that their satisfaction in their marriage dipped lower and lower as they had children, through their children's growing up years, until their children graduated High School. Then, once their children graduated High School and grew beyond the teen years, their satisfaction across the board raised considerably back to the high level it began with or even higher.

This illustrates the challenge of the hurried life. As our children cause our lives to become busier and busier, we are more dissatisfied with our relationships. Even with our spiritual relationships. But if we work to manage this and learn how to slow down, we can have a greater capacity to love. We cannot be who Jesus envisioned us to be in relationship to other people when rushing characterizes our lives. Relationships take time. Compassion takes time. Kindness takes time. This is why slowing is a spiritual discipline that we must consciously exercise.

Slowing and Simplicity

We will look at simplicity in more depth later, but there is a connection between the two. Slowing needs the concept of simplicity to work effectively. Jesus practiced both in his life by keeping his life simple so he could slow down when needed and focus on people. He was able to create simplicity because he focused everything on God's greatest command - Love God, Love People. When he kept that as his focus he was able to keep his life simple.

Slowing and Sabbath

When we slow down, we are doing the same thing in principle as taking Sabbath.

Taking Sabbath is essentially, in its very nature, trusting God to take care of our world and our cares while we stop and trust Him alone. Gary Hallaway describes it this way, "In Sabbath we truly rest from our work by letting God take care of things. For one day, we let him do our work for us."

In our work-a-day world, we think we have to move faster to get everything done. And if we don't do it, it will not get done right! Sabbath is a principle which forces us to depend on God. It causes us to bodily take time away, either for a full day

or half a day, or in the case of slowing, for just a moment, and say to God, "You are in control not me."

When we made the good confession as believers in Jesus Christ at our baptism, we were essentially laying our lives in Jesus' hands and saying we will trust him with our lives. Do we? This is what slowing and Sabbath focus on.

Conclusion: Slowing is a discipline designed to eradicate frenzy from our lives. The practice means placing yourself in circumstances which create time for noticing and attending to others. Slowing means placing yourself in situations where you are forced to wait and "smell the roses."

Practice

1. I cannot emphasize enough that these practices are not to be done for God's approval - God already loves you as much as He will ever love you. These practices are for you! They will help you come to love God more, love life more, love others more, and love your possessions less.
2. This week you have a devotional on the back of the sermon outline. It has instructions on what to do four times this week. Next week, as we come to class let's talk about what we experienced this week with God.
3. We have been given a wonderful gift. We have four great opportunities to use this gift this week. Be sure to find the 10 minutes on four days this week to practice this marvelous gift. Start today and do it!