



STRATEGIC RENEWAL



Obeying Your Spiritual Speed Limit (Hint: It's Slower Than You Think)

By Justin Jeppesen

Slowing down helps us to willingly live within the limits God has placed on our lives and deliberately creates space for us to be aware of God's work in, through, and around us. While this practice swims upstream against the current of our world's ever-increasing speed of life, I hope you will see the immense benefits of taking this invitation to slow down seriously.



“Slowing is a way we counter our culture’s mandate to tend to the bottom line, to move it or lose it, to constantly be on the go. It is a way to honor our limits and the fact that God is found in the present moment...So ask God to help you live in the now. The present moment is the only moment we ever have to live. It is here, and it will never come again.”^[1]

Your life will always go in the direction of whatever captures your attention. Slowing down allows space for the Spirit to recalibrate your soul to a Christ-ward focus. It increases within us the much-needed capacity to be fully present to God, ourselves, and others. Yet we all know the daily battle of our attention being ambushed by innumerable distractions. Often the greatest culprit is the little high-powered computer we carry in our pockets. Studies have found that the average smartphone user touches their phone over 2,617 times a *day!*^[2] In an age of distraction, slowing down helps us focus on what really matters.

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Spiritual disciplines writer Nathan Foster recently declared that, “Distraction is the curse of our age. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of efficient people, or busy people, but for *present* people.”

Slowing Down Helps Us Savor God’s Goodness

Living in a hurry will always rob us of the joy of the present moment. Think about it. When have you ever enjoyed a meal while scarfing it down in a rush with your mind consumed over the next thing you need to get to?



I often think of my grandmother, who would *always* be the last one at the table during a family meal. The rest of the family would be done with their meal and dessert and start clearing the dishes while my grandma would *still* be sitting there, savoring every last bite. While I remember all of us giving her a hard time for how slowly she ate, I am certain she was the one who most enjoyed the meal and the fellowship around the table.

Slowing down heightens our awareness of the multitude of ways God demonstrates His tangible goodness to us.

Slowing Down Cultivates Intimacy

Taking our cue from the pace of Jesus' life, we can live with urgency without being in a hurry. I am always amazed that Jesus was never in a rush to get to His ministry. I am often reminded how He spent 30 years in almost complete obscurity before beginning His public ministry. You would think that once He began, He wouldn't waste any precious time, since He would only have three years to finish His work at Calvary. But in the gospels we often see Jesus withdraw from ministry in order to cultivate intimacy with His Father (see Mark 1:35-39; 6:31).

Relationships marked by authentic intimacy and genuine love take *time* to build. I recently heard this parental adage: "Kids spell love as T.I.M.E." Could it be that the true test of where our love lies is in how and with whom we spend our time? Time spent not just in quantity but by quality is a true measure of love. It seems that Jesus knew this by how He prioritized consistent and undistracted quality time with His Heavenly Father. For us to do this, we must slow down often and long enough to actually be fully present to God and with those around us.



do nothing, you're a slave to doing. Doing nothing is a radical, revolutionary act. It frees you from the universal slavery of our age: slavery to the clock. The clock measures doing but not our being."

Far from simply being lazy, slowing is an intentional "doing nothing" in order to reverse our disordered priorities. You see, slowing down actually helps produce the needed depth in order for our lives to bear fruit that lasts. Yet we often try to do in a hurry what the Spirit wants to do slowly. No wonder one of the nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit is *patience*. Returning to the way of life Jesus modeled for us and empowers us to emulate, Dallas Willard once quipped, "Though Jesus saw his work in the lives of others as urgent, he pursued it patiently."

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I love how Jesus employs the beautiful metaphor of the vine and branches. He says, ***"I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing"*** (John 15:5). Abiding takes time. It prioritizes *being* over doing. Our lives will only bear enduring fruit if our doing flows from our being with God.

As one seasoned pastor wisely noted, "Healthy growth takes TIME. When God wants to make a mushroom, he takes 6 hours. When he wants to make an oak tree, he takes 60 years. Do you want to be a mushroom or an oak tree?"^[3]

Practical Suggestions for Slowing Down



few suggestions to get us started.

Drive in the slow lane (and keep to the speed limit!). Be honest, how many of you just cringed? I did even as I wrote it. But time in the car can wonderfully be redeemed for focused times of prayer. Your car commute can become an intentional Jesus pursuit.

Choose the long checkout line at the grocery store. Instead of looking at your phone while you wait, ask God to show you what He sees in the moment. You'll be surprised at what, or often who, you notice and the opportunities that will open up for you to be salt and light.

Eat more slowly. Taking the cue from my grandmother, carve out space for meal times to savor the moment, not only to enjoy the gift of food, but more importantly the people around you.

Bookend your day with giving God your attention. It was said of the German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer that he would begin and end his day in silence so that God would always have the first and last word. Build in time when you awake and go to sleep to sit with the Lord and enjoy His presence.

Here's to a slowed down Spring season in order to cultivate a more satisfying, deep, and fruitful life with God!

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Justin most recently served as a pastor and professor at the University of Northwestern in St. Paul, MN. He led hundreds of young adults, along with other staff, in the rhythms of prayer and the ministry of the word. Before serving in his role at Northwestern, Justin spent 10 years in pastoral ministry



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three kids and live in St. Paul, where they get to experience all the wonderful seasons God has created!

[1] Calhoun, Ahlberg Adele. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*: Practices that transform us. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL. p. 89

[2] Julia Naftulin, <https://www.businessinsider.com/dscout-research-people-touch-cell-phones-2617-times-a-day-2016-7>

[3] 20. Rick Warren, 10 Key Points to Remember in 2012, <http://pastors.com/10-key-points-to-remember-in-2012/>.

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