
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

October 18, 2015

Overcommitted Lives

“Your servant got busy doing this and that, and the prisoner disappeared.”
1 Kings 20:40 (Common English Bible)

Early in my ministry, I served a congregation that had enormous challenges. The former pastor had been removed from ministry, the congregation had suffered a plateau in membership, and the financial health was strained. Much was required to return the ministry of that church back to good health. I poured myself into the mission and ministry of that congregation as the new pastor. I attended every committee meeting, taught a Sunday School class as well as provided most of the preaching and sought to meet all the pastoral care needs of the church. My heart was in the right place; my practice of ministry was seriously flawed. I exhausted myself. The result would be that the quality of my preaching, administrative leadership and pastoral care was diminished. I failed the church from over commitment.

Here is a story in the Old Testament of someone who was asked to do one job well – guarding a prisoner. For a while the man did just that, he stood watch over the prisoner in his charge. He did nothing else. And the prisoner remained a prisoner. Yet, he thought he could do more, that he could “do this and that” to help Israel be victorious in battle. The unfortunate result is that the one thing Israel required of him wasn’t done. He permitted himself to be overcommitted and failed.

The character and tempo of modern-day living is captured in my story and the biblical story. We seem always on the move, operating on a tight schedule, all the while an anxious eye on the clock. Rarely are such people trying to demonstrate their worth to others. More often they are simply committed to the mission of their organization and seek to advance it forward. The pace of life grows swifter, the pressure becomes greater and eventually, we discover why God rested on the seventh day after creation. A balance of work and rest sustains us. And any organization is advanced by each of us doing a few things well and equipping others to share in the work.

There are people who are not turning out their best work because they are so “busy doing this and that.” A popular expression that is in use today is that they have “too much on their plate.” Such people fail to practice discrimination of the important verses the secondary with the ill-fated consequence of doing little well. Perspective is lost and the prisoner – any force that is determined to diminish our work – escapes.

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