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Confessions of a driven pastor (Part Two)

by Lance Witt

"I know you're busy, but..." I began to notice a pattern. More and more people who wanted to talk with me began our conversation with those words. My own staff, small group leaders, church members coming out of a worship service – the people around me began to feel like they were an interruption or imposition. People were sensing that I was in a hurry and overloaded.

I confess to you that I am a hurrier. I wish I had a dollar for every time my family has heard me say in an irritated tone, "Hurry up!" Sometimes I walk in a hurry and leave my wife behind. When I have to wait, or get delayed, or there is dead time in a worship service, or someone is telling a long story, I find myself internally saying, "Hurry up."

The truth is I hate the pressures on my schedule, but I love being in demand. More often than I want to admit, the feeling of being in demand is intoxicating. Having every moment filled with activity and noise can be a kind of drug. It can actually become the fuel that keeps us going at an insane pace.

“For years I intuitively knew that I was violating my soul. In honest and quiet moments, I longed to get off the treadmill but didn't know how.”

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The badge of busyness

The badge of busyness is one that we ministers often wear with honor, but in reality it is a curse to the health of a soul. Before long, busyness is not just about the length of my to-do list or the number of meetings on my BlackBerry. It has morphed into a state of mind and disposition of the soul.

I have a hurried spirit. So, even when I try to be alone with God, I have difficulty staying engaged in the moment. I sometimes feel guilty and embarrassed that my spiritual attention span is so short. My hurried spirit constantly reminds me of all that I should be doing. I know Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." Yet, I often feel like I don't know how to turn off the noise.

For years I intuitively knew that I was violating my soul. In honest and quiet moments, I longed to get off the treadmill but didn't know how.

Everything in our culture and most everything in our ministry world goes against slowing down and paying attention to our soul. This insatiable need for speed sets us up for a monumental spiritual struggle. Our lives are over-stimulated, but our souls are undernourished.

You cannot live life at warp speed without warping your soul. You cannot follow Jesus at a sprint. A fulfilling and empowering connection with God cannot develop in busyness.

Unhurried time is a non-negotiable quality of all intimate relationships.

Jesus' example

When you study the life of Jesus, you soon discover that he never seems to be in a hurry. One of the things he regularly took time for was time alone with his father. These carefully guarded

moments with his father were spiritually energizing and replenishing.

The Bible says Jesus regularly withdrew (Mark 4:35, Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12). "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a *solitary place*, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35 NIV). When I read a verse like this one, I don't know about you, but I long for more of that in my life. There is something in my soul that knows I need moments of solitude, quiet, and slow.

That does not come easy for me. Over the last couple of months, I have been anything but the poster child for solitude. But, I can also tell you that the pursuit of a healthy soul is much more on my radar these days than it used to be. Establishing a life that pays attention to my soul is a higher priority.

Thomas Moore wrote, "The vessel in which soul-making takes place is an inner container scooped out by reflection and wonder."

In other words, imagine your life as a container or bucket. Your life is full of things, pressures, distractions, temptations, and fast-paced living. Thomas Moore says that it is reflection and wonder (solitude) that scoops these out of our soul. It is through being quiet that we make room to meet God and let him do the work that he longs to do in us.

Four tips for a healthy soul

At the risk of giving you more to do, let me finish by giving you some challenges to consider as we move into a new year.

1. Slow Down. Walk a little slower this week. Don't check your e-mail as soon as you get out of bed. Engage in unhurried conversation. Drive slower. Don't rush through your quiet time.

2. Schedule times of spiritual reflection and solitude. Put them on your calendar as recurring appointments. You may feel like you can't afford to carve out this kind of time, but you can't afford *not* to make time for this.

3. Start reading to feed your soul. Pick up a book that isn't about leadership skills or church growth. Find something that will feed your soul and deepen your relationship with Jesus.

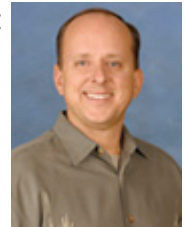
4. Schedule a mini personal retreat. Sometime in the early part of the new year, take a half day or a day just to get alone and be with your heavenly Father. Why not go ahead right now and block off some time in early January?

God speaks in the margins of life. To hear God and know God, you must create space in your life. You must create margin moments in your day when you can just "be" with Jesus. These times will not only help you grow, they will replenish and nourish your soul.

Article by Lance Witt

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