

INTRODUCTION

This morning I presented a vision of discipleship in terms of the long, slow change of deep, heart-level habits that over time shape our desires which in turn transform our character into the image of Christ. I mentioned the fact that you can't rush or force discipleship.

Now this morning I was talking about the big picture. Discipleship takes time. But it's also true from a different perspective.

You cannot mature as a Christian without slowing down. The hurried life is a life that will not be transformed into the image of Christ.

THE HURRIED LIFE

But the fact of the matter is that too many of us are too busy to slow down. From the moment you get up in the morning until you go to bed at night, you race from place to place and from one obligation to the next.

Some of you may have been raised in a family with endless "activities—school rehearsals and functions, art or music lessons, athletic practices and events." Activities that kept "you constantly on the go. The family vehicles (we can't do it all with just one)" are basically "taxicabs that carry clients from home to school to practice to lesson to fast-food joint to friend's house to youth function...and then back home again...By the time we finally settle down for the night we are exhausted."

This isn't normal. "Our frantic pace is unprecedented in history...Our homes are filled with...time-saving devices...from microwaves and dishwashers to automatic sprinklers and bread machines...[You] would think that we would have ample time to spare." But we don't.¹

One of the first and most important obstacles you will face, if you want to become truly human and truly yourself is your schedule.

JESUS WAS NOT BUSY

When we look at Jesus, we see that he was not busy. Did he have heavy demands? Yes. There was difficult work at hand. But he was not busy. He had a wide margin of quiet leisure that defied the dehumanizing demands imposed on him by others. The result was a "gentle readiness to welcome others, to receive them with grace and comforting encouragement. He is a model to all of us of the kind of non-busy life that is fully engaged [and deeply involved] with other [people]...But [Jesus] never gives those he is with a sense of being rushed."²

I am blessed with that kind of father. My dad had much to do, and much important work to do, but he never gave me the impression that he had to hurry off from any conversation with me. His mind is never anxious about other things, his body is never fidgety to be on to something else. When I call my Dad or interrupt him or whatever, there hasn't been a single time in my life that he gave me the impression that he was in a hurry and I was in the way. My dad always receives me as someone he appreciates as a person.

In the book Cory has asked you to read, John Ortberg makes the important point: “Following Jesus cannot be done at a sprint. If we want to follow someone, we can’t go faster than the one who is leading...Hurry is not a disordered schedule. Hurry is a disordered heart.”³ In other words, busyness is a spiritual illness. You cannot become truly human and truly yourself if you are always looking at your watch.⁴ Discipleship cannot be hurried. You cannot speed walk with God.

Transition: Turn with me, in your Bible, to Ecclesiastes 3.

TIME IS A GIFT FROM GOD (not a resource)

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8.

The point of this poem is that God has created the universe in such a way that everything has a proper time. Keep reading. [Ecclesiastes 3:9–13.](#)

Time is God’s gift to us. It’s God who created time. Jump back to [Genesis 1:3–5.](#)

Time is God’s invention. When he created the world. Over and over he stopped his work, looked at what he had made, and declared, *“It is good”* ([vv4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25](#)). When God declared, *“It is good,”* he was looking at all that he had made. And this includes time. Time is one of the good gifts that God has given us.

But for too many of us, “time is an enemy that makes us frantic.”⁵ We take time for granted. We treat it like a tool, like a human resource, like another commodity to be consumed. We strive against it. But what we need to do is this, we need to embrace time as a precious gift from God. We must learn to receive time as God’s gift. And when do this, we can trust that the time God gives us will be adequate for work and rest and delight. And that’s when we are released from hurry.

Transition: So how do we do that? How do wake up each day, and “receive the day.” Open the day as a gift from God.⁶

TIME IS STRUCTURED BY GOD (not by us)

The answer, it’s back in [Ecclesiastes 3:1](#), *“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”*

To receive the gift of time, you must receive it on its own terms. You can’t change it. Don’t try to change it. You must accept the nature of time. And the nature of time, this gift from God, is that “time is not an undifferentiated quantity.”⁷ God has stamped time with a structure.

Heady stuff; I know. Let me show you what I mean.

Think about the poem in Ecclesiastes 3. *“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal...”* Look at v11. *“He has made everything beautiful in its time.”*

Do you see, “God is the author of time, including its ongoing and...daily rhythms.”⁸

This is so important to see. Go back to [Genesis 8:22](#).

You see, God has given a rhythm to time. Day and night. Weeks. Months. Seasons. Years.

We are wrong to “consider time to be at our disposal, to be organized and scheduled, measured and distributed, invested and spent, as we choose. According to the Bible...God is the one who controls time throughout our lives. Both the beginning and the end of life are in God’s hands” [Job 1:21] and the whole point of Ecclesiastes 3 is that the very rhythm of time is in God’s hands.

“For everything there is a season...He has made everything beautiful in its time.”

Transition: Now, since God has stamped his creation with a rhythm, we must respect and honor that rhythm. We must stop ignoring it and striving against it. Time is God’s creation. He created it. He created it’s nature, and he gives it a rhythm. And time, along with the rhythm of time is God’s gift to us. We must not murder it. We must enter into it. Embrace it.

So what is God’s rhythm? How has God structured time? Well, let’s look. Turn to [Genesis 1](#).

THE STRUCTURE OF TIME

Notice v3, *“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’...[end of v5] And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”*

- v6, *“And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters’...[end of v8] And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.”*
- v9, *“And God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear’...[v13] And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.”*
- v14, *“And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night’...[v19] And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.”*
- v20, *“And God said, ‘Let the waters swarm with living creatures’...[v23] And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.”*
- v24, *“And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures’...[end of v31] And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”*

Can you hear the rhythm? “And God said...and it was so,” “evening and morning...evening and morning...evening and morning...” sleeping and waking.

And remember what I pointed out earlier. 6x God looks at his creation and declares, “***It is good***” (vv4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). And then for the 7th time, in v31 he declares, “***It is very good.***” What does this mean for us? It means that “God finds the whole of creation to be not only good but *delightful*, the occasion for intense and sustained joy.”⁹ And this includes, the rhythm of time. “Evening and morning.”

Look, this structure is “grace embedded in the earth’s rotation...Sleeping and waking are theological as well as biological.”¹⁰

“We begin our lives asleep in the womb, formed by another. Passive in the darkness, we are made...In our early days we are more asleep than awake...People who live by faith have always welcomed the evening hour...sinking into the quiet rhythms of God’s creating and covenanting words.”¹¹ “The work of God begins while we are asleep and without our help.”¹²

In the mornings, when we awake, “the day is half-over. While we have been sleeping, God has been working. We wake into a world in which God’s word has been making aspens and salamanders and puppies.”¹³

Do you see it. “God has given us the daily rhythm” of sleeping and waking.

Remember Ecclesiastes “***For everything there is a season...He has made everything beautiful in its time.***” You cannot mature as a Christian without slowing down. The hurried life is a spiritual illness. And to resist the frantic approach of our culture, we must embrace the rhythm that God has stamped on time.

Now, I want to commend to you 2 practical tools that I have found to be enormously helpful in my own attempts to receive the day as God’s gift.

RECEIVING THE DAY

1. Fixed Hour Prayer
2. The Examen

First of all, Fixed Hour Prayer

This is a spiritual discipline that has been a great blessing to me over the past 4 years. It’s helped me to remember God throughout the day, to slow down and find some healing from the spiritual illness of hurry and busyness.

The history of Fixed Hour Prayer stretches all the way back into the Old Testament.

- In the Old Testament there was a pattern of praying at set times every day. **Psalm 119:164**, *“Seven times a day I praise you.”*
- By the 1st century AD this had Jewish prayer times were 6am, 9am, 12 noon, 3pm, and 6pm.
- Then, when you turn to the New Testament we see that the “first detailed miracle of the...Church, the healing of the lame man on the Temple steps...occurred when and where it did because two ...Christians...were on their way to” 9am prayers.¹⁴ **Acts 3:1**, *“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.”*
- And then a few years later, one of the great defining events of Christianity—Peter’s vision of the descending sheet filled with both clean and unclean animals—occur[ed] at noon on a rooftop because he had gone there to observe” noon prayers. **Acts 10:9**, *“The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.”*
- We know from historical evidence that in the 2nd and 3rd centuries , Christians continued this practice of praying at 6am, 9am, noon, 3pm, and 6pm.

Now remember, this is not a command. It’s a spiritual discipline. You don’t have to do it. It’s merely a spiritual discipline that I commend to you. It’s something God’s people have found to be helpful. And it’s something that I have found to be very helpful in resisting the disease of busyness.

The way I practice this discipline is that I rhythm my days by getting alone with God:

- Morning – first thing in the morning. For me this is different on different mornings. I have two schedules. An early schedule and a late schedule. On my early days, I meet with the Lord at 5:30am. On late days, I meet with the Lord at 9am.
- Mid day – 1:30pm.
- Early Evening – 4:30pm
- and before going to sleep – last thing I read at night is Scripture.

Now, a few things about praying in the morning. I encourage you to learn to offer your first thoughts in the morning and your first words in the morning to God. Break the long and profound silence of night, with words of prayer and praise. If you’re not a morning person, this doesn’t have to be your extended daily time alone with God. But you can do something.

- **Psalm 5:3**, *“O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.”*
- **Psalm 88:13**, *“I, O Lord, cry to you in the morning my prayer comes before you.”*
- **Lamentations 3:22–23**, *“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.”*

The Bible presents example after example of people who sought God in the morning.

- Abraham (Gen 19:27; Gen 22:3), Jacob, Moses (Exod 8:20; 9:13; 24:4), Joshua (Joshua 3:1; 6:12), and Jesus (Mark 1:35)

All of these men, broke the silence of morning with prayer.

My own habit: The Lord's Prayer.

I can't tell you how soul-shaping this has been in my life. From the time I learned how to read. I've not always kept the discipline perfectly, but it's been a basic rhythm of life in good and bad times to start my days in prayer and Scripture reading.

Now if you choose to do this. Find a "secret place." ([Matthew 6:6](#), "*When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.*")

So find your "secret place," shut your door. Whatever it takes to give your full attention to God. And once the time arrives and you are in place:

- Take a deep breath. Let it out slow.
- Remember that you are in God's presence.
- You can pray the Lord's Prayer or the Jesus Prayer.
- If you read a passage of Scripture, allow your mind to focus on something that catches you in the passage. It may be a "compelling image, a powerful word, or a phrase—something that commands your attention."¹⁵
- And then as your mind and heart are moved in prayer, respond to God. You're with Jesus. "Let him look at you, touch you, and speak to you...Speak in any way your heart desires. And learn to listen." As you read his word, let Jesus "become the single focus of your time set apart" for his presence.¹⁶

If you decide to do Fixed Hour Prayer, don't let this depend on when you "feel" like praying and reading the Bible. This is a "long-term formative" thing, and I encourage you to take it on trust from others that it will be worthwhile" in a few years if you persevere.¹⁷

The rhythm of pulling aside at set times throughout the day to meet in the cell of your own soul with God will shape your life in all sorts of ways.

- Typically the way this shapes your life is barely perceptible.
- And yet, there are times where the transformation is significant and obvious.
- However, the most important way Fixed Hour Prayer works is that it becomes a habit of turning aside with the Father throughout the day. And what happens is that this habit shapes you at an unconscious level by shaping those layers of your self "where the sediment of the past is deposited." And this nourishes your "instincts, intuitions, and reactions."¹⁸

So that's Fixed Hour Prayer. Setting specific times aside to be with God every day. Those who practice this most often do it 4x each day: Morning, Noon, end of work day, and before going to sleep.

Transition: Now here's the second tool I want to encourage you with. It's another tool that God has been using in my life for the last four years. It's called The Examen. And I was so happy to see that Cory has been teaching this here for some time.

The Examen

Here's how it works.

- Choose a good place. "Jesus often chose to climb a mountain, enter a garden, depart to the desert, or rest in a boat on the water to pray and listen to God...Outside or inside, wherever you are most comfortable, find a quiet and peaceful spot" to do this. It may be in your closet or a corner of your room where you can set a special chair.¹⁹

It's true that you can pray anywhere and anytime, but setting a particular time and special place designated for prayer is very important for deepening the life of prayer.

- Now, once the time arrives and you are in place: You may want to have a candle or something or an icon. Take a deep breath.

John Ortberg gives a great description of this spiritual exercise in his book, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, on p 87. Five simple but elegant steps.

1. Be still for a moment and quiet your mind.
2. Acknowledge that Jesus is present. Invite him to teach you.
3. Go back in your mind to when you first woke up. Watch that scene, as if on video. This may lead you to pray for patience, greater love, courage, forgiveness, or other virtues.
4. Continue through the day, going from scene to scene. As you reflect on them, some scenes may fill you with gratitude, others with regret. Speak directly to the Lord about this. You may also be led to pray for some of the people you were interacting with during the day.
5. End with a prayer of thanksgiving for God's mercy and love. Ask him to refresh you as you sleep.

So that's it. It's called The Examen. It's been around in this form for about 500 years. It's got a pretty good track record.

Now many people do The Examen 2x each day. Once at the midday prayer, and once in the evening. I've found this to be incredible. Other day had a very stressful conversation in the morning. By praying the examen during my midday prayer time God helped me tremendously.

CONCLUSION

I want to become truly human, truly myself. Remember Kierkegaard's wonderful insight: "Now, with God's help, I shall become myself." That's what I want. And time is a good gift, a help God has given us. If we can learn to receive it as a gift, we will be able to resist one of the great idolatries of our age: busyness. I want to be like my dad. I want there to be space in my heart and my mind and my day for my children, and for the guy on the street, and for the friend who needs to talk. To do this, to have my character deeply changed, I must, you must, slow down and accept the rhythm of God's time. It's a gift of grace to us.

Let's pray.

¹ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 109–110.

² Marva Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 124.

³ John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1997] 2002), 79

⁴ Calvin Miller, *The Table of Inwardness: Nurturing our Inner Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 35–36.

⁵ Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, 38.

⁶ Dorothy Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

⁷ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 159.

⁸ Robert Banks, "Time, Use of," in Joel Green, gen. ed., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 781.

⁹ Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath*, 32.

¹⁰ Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (New York: HarperOne [1989] 1991), 61.

¹¹ Peterson, *Answering God*, 62.

¹² Peterson, *Answering God*, 66.

¹³ Peterson, *Answering God*, 65.

¹⁴ Phyllis Tickle, "An Introduction to this Manual," *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Springtime: A Manual for Prayer*, compiled and with a preface by Phyllis Tickle (New York: Image Books, 2001), viii.

¹⁵ Henri Nouwen with Michael Christensen and Rebecca Laird, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 66.

¹⁶ Nouwen, Christensen, and Laird, *Spiritual Direction*, 66.

¹⁷ David Ford, *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, [1997] 2004), 117.

¹⁸ Ford, *The Shape of Living*, 117.

¹⁹ Nouwen, Christensen, and Laird, *Spiritual Direction*, 65.