

TOO BUSY FOR TIME ALONE -- WITH GOD? (Part 1)
By Gary Tenpenny

(Editor's Note: This is the first of two parts.)

Several years ago, a friend suggested a getaway to a retreat center once every quarter to do business planning. He said this was helping him keep on track with his goals personally and in his business. As a goal-driven person, I took his suggestion seriously and started to act upon it. I found a time to be quiet and slow down, collect my thoughts and think more clearly without the noise of my home and workplace.

As God would have it, over time through my spiritual journey and growth, that quarterly retreat has become less about business and all about my time for getting alone with God. It is now one of the most important spiritual rhythms of my life. Without it, I have found that my spiritual health weakens.

We find many precedents for this in the Scriptures. Taking time alone, slowing down and breaking free from the noise and chaos of daily life was an important practice for most of the people God used to accomplish His purposes. Even Jesus Christ required these quiet times: "And after he had dismissed the crowds, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone" (Matthew 14:23).

Times of quiet and retreat were important to the people of Israel in many ways. For instance, Psalm 46 opens with these words of assurance: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake in their surging." Does this sound like what is going on in your life sometimes?

Toward the end of the psalm, rather than exhorting us to 'get up and do something!', we are told just the opposite: "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46:10). Amid the turmoil, we can still experience peace and quiet as we focus on God.

Thinking about my experience during these retreats, I realize how it reflects much of my spiritual journey and growth toward a life of intimacy with Jesus. Here are two key points I have learned:

1. I need to frequently get away from the noisiness of my daily life and move closer to God to hear what God has to say to me.
2. Even when life seems to be going just right (as defined by my limited, flawed human mind), God has something in store for me that is better than I can imagine. He loves me, and His plan for my life, though possibly quite different from my current life, will be joyful.

I often ask successful people, whether they are followers of Jesus or not, how they would rank the quality of their lives on a scale of 1-5. Not in terms of finances, but just in general: How good is life for you? Most say they are "okay" and rank their lives "somewhere in the 4 range." Now imagine the scale goes to 10. How does it make you feel to know there is a whole other level of joy, peace and fulfillment available to you that you are not even aware of?

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In next week's Monday Manna, the second half of this series will offer some practical suggestions on how to capitalize on the value of spending time alone, drawing from simple steps that I have found helpful in my own desire to slow down and find some quiet time for thinking, planning and reflection.

© 2024. Gary Tenpenny is an Executive/Leadership Coach with a biblical perspective, committed to walking with and building up other believers in all aspects of their lives. He is a Senior Area Director for CBMC Central Midwest.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever gone on a planning retreat of any kind? If so, what was that experience like for you? If not, how does that idea strike you?
2. What are some of the obstacles that you think might hinder the effectiveness of a planned "getaway" for getting quiet and removing oneself from the noise of everyday life and work?
3. How, when there is so much to be done, can hitting the "pause button" and intentionally scheduling time away from everything help people in their quest to become more successful?
4. Does it make any difference to you learning that even Jesus Christ and many of the spiritual leaders of the Bible found it necessary to take quiet getaways from their responsibilities and daily activities? Why or why not?

Challenge For This Week

Have you considered how time alone with God could enhance your overall quality of life and help you to draw closer to God? Take time this week to pray and ask God to help you to prioritize time in your busy life to get away consistently with Him, just as Jesus always did.

Perhaps you might want to discuss this with a trusted friend or member of your CBMC group. They might have some helpful suggestions – they might even decide it sounds like a good idea for them as well!

NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:
Psalm 37:3-7, 100:3; Proverbs 16:3,9, 20:24, Habakkuk 2:20; Mark 6:30-32

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