

The Discipline Of The Simplicity Of Time

Simplicity with time requires the diligent intentionality of creating enough space that I may say yes to God about treasuring God and loving people.

— Jan Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*

Corrie ten Boom once said that if the devil can't make you sin, he'll make you busy. There's truth in that. Both sin and busyness have the exact same effect — they cut off your connection to God, to other people, and even to your own soul.

— John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*

Introduction

Our next Spiritual Discipline is the Discipline of the Simplicity of Time. This is one of the hardest Disciplines for many of us because, frankly, not being busy feels really weird. Our society thinks so too. Intentionally slowing down is the antithesis of modern life. However, if we truly want to open the space for our Reflective Wills to become bonded to our Embodied Wills, we really do need to work on eliminating needless, mindless hurry from our lives. The Discipline of the Simplicity of Time is also somewhat synonymous with the Discipline of Slowing, though the focus is different.

One of the challenges with this Spiritual Discipline is that much of the literature about it appears to be written to people who do not live in the same world in which we live. We think, "Wouldn't it be nice to have that kind of time to be able to do this!"

Our Guidelines

So we must once again return to our two primary guidelines for practicing the Spiritual Disciplines:

1. Start Small
2. Do What You Can, Not What You Can't

Now, before we look at strategies, we need to look at the opportunity costs associated with our lives of busyness, our lives of hurry.

Opportunity Costs

Since resources are limited, every time you make a choice about how to use them, you are also choosing to forego other options. Economists use the term opportunity cost to indicate what must be given up to obtain something that's desired. — Lumen Learning

This quote applies especially to how we choose to use our time. The Spiritual Discipline of the Simplicity of Time helps us to become aware of this and to look at what is underneath it. In Chapter 4 of *The Great Omission*, Dallas Willard comments on these underlying motives behind haste and rushing:

*Many well-meaning people . . . cannot succeed in being kind because they are too rushed to get things done. **Haste has worry, fear, and anger as close associates; it is a deadly enemy of kindness, and hence of love.** If this is our problem, we may be greatly helped by a day's retreat into solitude and silence, where we will discover that the world survives even though we are inactive. There we might prayerfully meditate to see clearly the damage done by our unkindness, and honestly compare it to what, if anything, is really gained by our hurry. **We will come to understand that for the most part our hurry is really based upon pride, self-importance, fear, and lack of faith, and rarely upon the production of anything of true value for anyone.***

Let's hear two of those sentences again slowly so that we can fully take them in:

- Haste has worry, fear, and anger as close associates; it is a deadly enemy of kindness, and hence of love.

And:

- We will come to understand that for the most part our hurry is really based upon pride, self-importance, fear, and lack of faith, and rarely upon the production of anything of true value for anyone.

Practice

So, we are going to do things a little differently today. Rather than a single practice at the end, we are going to do a series of short exercises instead and then move on to talk about some strategies.

Exercise #1: Let's take a few minutes to think about and list the places where hurry is a part of our lives. The goal here is to just come up with a list of places and not to do any sort of evaluation of them.

Exercise #2: Now looking at your list, try to come up with pros and cons for each. What is gained? What is lost?

Exercise #3: This is the hard one. Looking again at your list, think about what the motives for each might be. What is the need for hurry in this particular situation? Harder still: Who or what might be hurt by the hurrying? What might I be missing because of my hurry? Note: There is no self-condemnation here. The goal is simply to take a critical look at our hurry.

I am guessing that this was fairly uncomfortable. I know that it certainly was for me when I first did it. So let's take a look at some strategies that we can begin to practice as we seek the ruthless elimination of needless hurry.

Strategies

The Spiritual Discipline of the Simplicity of Time is something that we should not attempt to hurry through! Taking the Discipline of the Simplicity of Time slowly is our first step in the ruthless elimination of hurry. This practice takes time, especially in the culture in which we live. So be gentle with yourselves.

Here are some starter strategies:

1. **Unhurried Space / No Hurry Zone:** Find a regular time and place to designate as your No Hurry Zone. This may be as simple as taking time to actually taste and enjoy your morning coffee, or taking five minutes to stand or sit by a window and watch the wildlife and the weather. Perhaps it could be taking just a moment to offer a short

prayer as you head to your next appointment. Regardless of what it is, as you do it, ask God to help you relax. And enjoy. Notice everything around you and all the good people and things that fill your life.

2. **Queues:** When you are at the grocery store or anywhere where there are checkout lines, purposely pick the longest line. Yes, you heard that right.
3. **Driving:** Drive the speed limit. Yes, you also heard that one right.
4. **Slow Lane:** Travel in the slow lane. Notice the scenery. Practice the presence of God. Pray.
5. **Appointments:** Show up ten minutes early. Bring a book. Leave your phone alone.
6. **Parent Your Phone:** Put it to bed at least an hour before you go to bed. Seriously!
7. **Quiet Mornings:** Don't look at your phone, news, or any media first thing. Instead, wait until you have finished your quiet time, whatever that might look like.
8. **Single-Task:** Multitasking is a myth. Here is why: a) only God is omnipresent, and b) we are not God. *God is God, and I am not.*
9. **Walk Slower:** This is as hard as driving in the slow lane!

If you don't like any of these, invent your own. Have fun with this, and don't be afraid to laugh at yourself. When I was working, I almost never took any vacation time. I had great reasons for this. Finally, a couple of years ago, Heidi convinced me to take a long weekend to stay in a cabin in Estes Park. I quite literally spent the whole time worried that I was doing "vacation" wrong rather than just enjoying our time together and the beauty all around us.

Journaling

Journaling has never really been my thing. However, this Spiritual Discipline of the Simplicity of Time was the first monthly practice at my school, and we were required to keep a journal. I found some great software and was able to do so. I would encourage you to journal for at least a month if you decide to take on the Spiritual Discipline of the Simplicity of Time.

Why? There are a number of reasons:

1. To keep track of new ideas.
2. To note who or what is hurt by your hurry.
3. To notice what drives you to hurry.
4. To notice what is going on inside of you when you are tempted to hurry.
5. To discuss what it is like for you to live without hurry.
6. To document your experiments, successes, and not so successes.
7. To track the many places where hurry has subtly crept into our lives.
8. To laugh at ourselves.

Here is one example from my journaling experience. As I mentioned last week, Heidi and I go to the Longmont Recreation Center early in the morning several days each week. I walk the track for one hour while Heidi is in the pool. One day as I was journaling about hurry, I realized that I had been trying to hurry during my time on the track. How silly! No matter how fast or slow I go, it will always take the exact same amount of time, one hour. I had to laugh at myself.

Reflection Discussion

What thoughts do you have at this point? Does this seem like a Spiritual Discipline that you would be interested in trying? Does the idea of it resonate with you? Do you have any lingering questions? As with our other Spiritual Disciplines, I am happy to assist you with this in whatever ways I am able, even after our time together here today is done.