

A Rhythm Reader

Instructions: Read through the quotes slowly. Underline, circle and star passages that speak to you. Journal your thoughts.

“People are born and married, and live and die, in the midst of an uproar so frantic that you would think they would go mad of it”. William Dean Howells, 1907¹

In 1982 Larry Doessey, an American physician, coined the term “time sickness” to describe the obsessive belief that “time is getting away, that there isn’t enough of it, and that you must pedal faster and faster to keep up.” These days, the whole world is time-sick. We all belong to the same cult of speed.²

Consider the damage that living in the fast lane can inflict on family life. With everyone coming and going, Post-it stickers on the fridge door are now the main form of communication in many homes. According to figures released by the British government, the average working parent spends twice as long dealing with email as playing with her children.³

This is where our obsession with going fast and saving time leads. To road rage, air rage, shopping rage, relationship rage, office rage, vacation rage, gym rage. Thanks to speed, we live in the age of rage.⁴

Survival was one incentive for measuring time. Ancient civilizations used calendars to work out when to plant and harvest crops. Right from the start, though, timekeeping proved to be a double-edged sword. On the upside, scheduling can make anyone, from peasant farmer to software engineer, more efficient. Yet as soon as we start to parcel up time, the tables turn, and time takes over. We become slaves to the schedule. Schedules give us deadlines, and deadlines, by their very nature, give us a reason to rush. As an Italian proverb puts it: Man measures time, and time measures man.⁵

As long ago as the sixth century, Benedictine monks lived by a routine that would make a modern time manager proud. Using primitive clocks, they rang bells at set intervals throughout the day and night to hurry each other from one task to the next, from prayer to study to farming to rest, and back to prayer again. When mechanical clocks began springing up in town squares across Europe, the line between keeping time and keeping control blurred further. Cologne offers a revealing case study. Historical records suggest that a public clock was erected in the German city around 1370. In 1374, Cologne passed a statute that fixed the start and end of the workday for laborers, and limited their lunch break to “one hour and no longer.” In 1391, the city imposed a curfew of 9 P.M. (8 P.M. in winter) on foreign visitors, followed by a general curfew of 11 P.M. in 1398. In the space of one generation, the people of Cologne went from never knowing for sure what time it was to allowing a clock to dictate when they worked, how long they took for lunch and when they went home every night. Clock Time was gaining the upper hand over Natural Time.⁶

“Cannot the laborers understand that by over-working themselves they exhaust their own strength and that of their progeny, that they are used up and long before their time come to be incapable of any work at all, that absorbed and brutalized by this single vice they are no longer men but pieces of men, that they kill within themselves all beautiful faculties, to leave nothing alive and flourishing except the furious madness for work.” Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy* (1883)⁷

IN A WORLD OBSESSED WITH WORK, leisure is a serious matter. The United Nations declared it a basic human right in 1948. Half a century later, we are inundated with books, websites, magazines, TV shows and newspaper supplements dedicated to hobbies and having fun. Leisure Studies is even an academic discipline.⁸

¹ Carl Honoré, *In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed*, (New York, NY: First HarperCollins, 2004), I.

² Ibid., 3.

³ Ibid., 9.

⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁷ Ibid., 187.

⁸ Ibid., 216.

The ancient practices of the faith are seven in number, have come into Christianity out of Judaism, and inform all of the Abrahamic faiths. Three of them – tithing, fasting, and the sacred meal -- have to do with the physical body, its work and its needs. Three of them have to do with the monitoring of time. Fixed-hour prayer regulates the hours of the day, and Sabbath-keeping monitors the days of the week. The liturgical year monitors or paces those same days and the weeks into the cohesive whole of basic human timekeeping, the year itself. The seventh of them, pilgrimage, engages both the physical space of the body and the dimension of time, requiring that we go at least once in a lifetime with holy intention to a place made sacred by the faith and encounters of other believers.⁹

The liturgical year is an adventure in bringing the Christian life to fullness, the heart to alert, the soul to focus. It does not concern itself with the questions of how to make a living. It concerns itself with the questions of how to make a life.¹⁰

The liturgical year is the year that sets out to attune the life of the Christian to the life of Jesus, the Christ. It proposes, year after year, to immerse us over and over again into the sense and substance of the Christian life until, eventually, we become what we say we are — followers of Jesus all the way to the heart of God. The liturgical year is an adventure in human growth, an exercise in spiritual ripening.¹¹

The liturgical year is the process of slow, sure immersion in the life of Christ that, in the end, claims us, too, as heralds of that life ourselves.¹²

No doubt about it: the liturgical year is the arena where our life and the life of Jesus intersect. In no other spiritual practice is that presence of Jesus so searing, so personal, so clear so developmental, so immediate. It is what that presence means to us now, in this life of ours, in this world of ours, that the liturgical year is really all about. In the liturgical year we walk with Jesus through all the details of His life — and He walks with us in ours.¹³

“The purpose of the liturgical year is to bring to life in us and around us, little by little, one layer of insight after another until we grow to full stature in the spiritual life”.¹⁴

All we have in life is life. Things — the cars, the house, the educations, the jobs, the money — come and go, turn to dust between our fingers change and disappear. Things do not make life, life. The gift of life, the secret of life, is that it must be developed from the inside out, from what we bring to it from within ourselves, not from what we collect or consume as we go through it, not even from what we experience in the course of it. It is not circumstance that makes or destroys a life. Anyone who has survived the death of a lover, the loss of a position, the end of a dream, the enmity of a friend knows that.¹⁵

Time presses upon us and tells us we're too busy to be contemplative, but our souls know better. Souls die from lack of reflection. Responsibilities dog us and tell us we're too involved with the “real” world to be concerned about the spiritual question. But it is always spiritual questions that make the difference in the way we go about our public responsibilities. Marriage, business, children, professions are all defined to keep contemplation out. We go about them as if there were no inherent spiritual dimension to each of them when the fact of the matter is that no one needs contemplation more than the harried mother, the irritable father, the ambitious executive, the striving professional, the poor woman, the sick man. Then, in those situations, we need reflection, understanding, meaning, peace of soul more than ever. People from all stages of life, in all periods of time have known the need, have pursued the presence of God at the most ungodly of times and situations.¹⁶

⁹ Joan Chittister, *The Liturgical Year*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), xviii-xix.

¹⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹² Ibid., 13.

¹³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁵ Joan Chittister, *Illuminated Life: Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 14.

¹⁶ Ibid., 16-17.

It is a busy world. A frightfully busy world sometimes. We live in a world the speed and pressures of which consume us, drain our souls, dry out our hearts, damp our spirits and make living more a series of duties than a kind of joyful mystery. We spend time making telephone callbacks, doing the shopping, hauling the laundry, running errands through narrow, crowded streets, grinding through routines, going to meetings, answering question after question, doing repetitive motions, standing in lines of one kind or another, making the long commute, falling into bed late – too late – day after day, night after night. We close our eyes at the end of the day and wonder where life has gone.¹⁷

ONE OF THE OBSESSIVE CONCERNS of contemporary society is speed. Everything we produce we produce to go faster than the ones before it. Planes go faster than the speed of sound, though no one cares. Cars are sold for their capacity to go from zero to sixty miles an hour in seconds, as if anyone ever needed to. Computer upgrades costing hundreds of dollar are downloaded every day to take milliseconds off the operating speed of the versions before them. To be valuable now, everything must go faster, start up more quickly, work at speeds measured in numbers no mind can calculate. We want instant oatmeal, electronic ticketing, accelerated educational programs, weekend college courses, and world news in thirty seconds or less. We are “a people on the move.” We want results. We are not a people who believe in process anymore, much as we love to talk about it.

But the spiritual life, the desert monastics knew, does not operate in high gear at high speed. The spiritual life — contemplation — is a slow, slow uncovering of the mechanics of the soul and the even slower process of putting it all back together again, of coming to see what we never saw before — God everywhere and, most of all, in us.¹⁸

But there are some things that cannot be hurried.¹⁹

“If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;
If you honor it, not going your own ways,
Serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;
Then you shall take delight in the LORD
And I will make you ride upon the heights”
Isaiah 58:13-14

The truth is, sabbath keeping is a discipline that will mess with you, because once you move beyond just thinking about it and actually begin to practice it, the goodness of it will capture you, body, soul and spirit. You will long to wake up to a day that stretches out in front of you with nothing in it but rest and delight. You will long for a simple way to turn your heart toward God in worship without much effort. You will long for a space in time when the pace is slow and family and friends linger with one another, savoring one another’s presence because no one has anywhere else to go.²⁰

“We long to see our lives whole, to know that they matter. We wonder whether our many activities might ever come together in a way of life that is good for ourselves and others. Lacking a vision of a life-giving way of life, we turn from one task to another, doing as well as we can but increasingly uncertain about what doing things well would look like. We yearn for a deeper understanding of how to order human life in accord with what is true and good.”

Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*²¹

An effective rhythm of spiritual practices will be very *personal*. No two individuals will have exactly the same rhythm, because no two people are alike. Your rhythm of spiritual practices will take into account your personality, your spiritual type, your season of life, the sin patterns you are contending with, the places where you know God is trying to stretch you. For instance, a relatively unstructured, spontaneous personality will need to be careful not to craft a rhythm of life that feels too structured and confining. A person who is more structured and enjoys closure will probably like having things mapped out in more detail.²²

¹⁷ Ibid, 17.

¹⁸ Ibid, 110-111.

¹⁹ Ibid, 111.

²⁰ Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 133 1

²¹ Ibid, 146.

²² Ibid, 148.

One of the great temptations of the spiritual life is to believe that if I were in another season of life, I could be more spiritual. The truth is that spiritual transformation takes place as we embrace the challenges and opportunities associated with each season of our life. This involves honestly regarding the challenges ("at this stage in our family's life, it is just not possible for me to get more than a half an hour in solitude a day") and willingness to embrace the opportunities ("Being around small children is teaching me so much about being a child in God's presence"). Our expectations about ordering our life during the different seasons need to take into account what's real and can't be changed; otherwise we set ourselves up for frustration and failure. This is a place for learning how to be compassionate with ourselves, because God certainly is.²³

"Over the margins of life comes a whisper, a faint call, a premonition of richer living which we know we are passing by. Strained by the very made pace of our daily outer burdens, we are further strained by an inward uneasiness, because we have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence -- a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power.

Thomas Kelly – *A Testament of Devotion*²⁴

"Those who have abandoned themselves to God always lead mysterious lives and receive from him exceptional and miraculous gifts by means of the most ordinary, natural and chance experiences in which there appears to be nothing unusual. The simplest sermon, the most banal conversations, the least erudite books become a source of knowledge and wisdom to these souls by virtue of God's purpose. This is why they carefully pick up the crumbs which clever minds tread under foot, for to them everything is precious and a source of enrichment"

Jean-Pierre De Caussade – *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*²⁵

"Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of invisible and visible winged seeds, so the stream of time brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them.

Thomas Merton – *Seeds of Contemplation*²⁶

"Germination is a strange process. It contains both death and life; like a new year, the old is cast aside, the new begins. The static perfection of the seed is thrown out of balance, undermined. Water seeps through husk and miracles occur. In arid Arizona after long wet winters the earth comes suddenly to life, and the desert blossoms. Seeds lying there dormant for many years waken to life laying purple blankets over vast slopes and painting hills with red and orange. Grain unearthed in dry Egyptian tombs planted in moist soil begin to swell and sprout ... From the seeds' constricted point of view, germinating is not a pleasant process. Penetrating through the shell, the water stirs activity. The germ of life is quickened, swells, begins to live.

Morton Kelsey – *Prayer and the Redwood Seed*²⁷

In his book, *A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas Kelly tells how we do that. "Many of the things we are doing seem so important to us. We haven't been able to say No to them, because they seemed so important. But if we *center down*, as the old phrase goes, and live in that holy Silence which is deeper than life, and take our life program into the silent places of the heart, with complete openness, ready to do, ready to renounce according to His leading, then many of the things we are doing lose their vitality for us".²⁸

There is an Oriental proverb that teaches, "Take from death before it takes from thee." If we do not live life consciously, in other words, we may not be living at all.²⁹

²³ Ibid., 149.

²⁴ Ken Gire, *The Reflective Life: Becoming More Spiritually Sensitive to the Everyday Moments of Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1998), 13.

²⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁶ Ibid., 39.

²⁷ Ibid., 61.

²⁸ Ibid., 117.

²⁹ Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*, (Crossroad Publishing Company, 2010), 4.

Anchored in the Bible, steeped in Jewish ways, embraced by Jesus Himself, and practiced by the New Testament church, the answer to the dilemma we have been living is found in one word: *rhythm*.

The Jewish prophet Jeremiah lamented over this forgotten principle:

Cranes know when it's time to move south for winter.
And robins, warblers, and bluebirds know when
it's time to come back again. But my people? My
people know nothing, not the first thing of God
and his rule. (Jer. 8:7)³⁰

In my work with leaders in the marketplace and ministry, one thing has become clear: Most problems in relationships, work, and health can be traced back to this lack of rhythm, an absence of a varied tempo in living life. In our abuse of the God-given rhythms, we allow ourselves to fall victim to our cultures pouring us into its own mold.³¹

"Lord of Creation,
Create in us a new rhythm of life
Composed of hours that sustain
Rather than stress,
Of days that deliver rather than destroy,
Of time that tickles rather than tackles".³²

What happened to margin? It was steamrolled by history. Let's go back and see how this happened.³³

"Matins, lauds, prime, terce, sext, none, vespers,
compline – that your hours will pierce me with arrows
and wounds of praise".³⁴

Luci Shaw³⁴

"Time is not our enemy, nor is it a hostile place from which we must flee.
It is a meeting place, a point of rendezvous with God".

Dorothy Bass, *Receiving The Day*³⁵

The "divine hours" as traditionally practiced by religious orders usually include the following:

- Vigils, about 3 a.m.
- Lauds, greeting the beginning of the day
- Prime, the start of the day's work
- Terce, the third hour, perhaps midmorning
- Sext, midday
- None, midafternoon
- Vespers, as the day is over and evening comes
- Compline, when the day is complete and sleep begins³⁶

I like to think of the attentive life also as the *contemplative* life, for *contemplative* literally means "putting together." We connect the dots between the *chronos* and the *kairos* of our life, relate the hours that we measure by the clock to the hours and seasons of our soul.³⁷

³⁰ Stephen W. Smith, *The Jesus Life: Eight Ways to Recover Authentic Christianity*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 33.

³¹ Ibid., 41.

³² Ibid., 49.

³³ Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overload Lives*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1992), 55.

³⁴ Leighton Ford, *The Attentive Life: Discerning God's Presence in All Things* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 19.

³⁵ Ibid., 19.

³⁶ Ibid., 21.

³⁷ Ibid., 23.

“We live in an age of continuous partial attention”.
Linda Stone³⁸

“Ruthlessly eliminate hurry”.
Dallas Willard to John Ortberg³⁹

May Sarton’s “Now I Become Myself” came to me:

Now there is time, and Time is young.
O, in this single hour I live
All of myself and do not move.
I the pursued, who madly ran,
Stand still, stand still, and stop the sun.⁴⁰

We do our work for Jesus, with Jesus, to Jesus.
And that's what keeps it simple.

Mother Teresa⁴¹

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Fill me with life anew.

Edwin Hatch⁴²

He gives power to the faint,
And strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
And the young will fall exhausted;
But those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:29-31

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
His steadfast love endures forever!

Psalm 118:1

Therefore,
Let nothing hinder us,
Nothing separate us,
Nothing come between us.
Wherever we are,
In every place,
At every hour,
At every moment of the day,
Everyday and continually,
Let all of us ...
Hold in our heart and love,
Honor; adore, serve,
Praise and bless,
Glorify and exalt,
Magnify and give thanks.

Francis of Assisi⁴³

³⁸ Ibid, 99.

³⁹ Ibid, 99.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 202.

⁴¹ Ibid, 208.

⁴² Ibid, 208.

⁴² Ibid, 208.

⁴³ Ibid, 208-209.

He gives strength to the weary
And increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
And young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:29-31

Return, O my soul, to your rest,
For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
Psalm 116:7

My soul magnified the Lord,
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.
Luke 1:46

The Lord Almighty grant us a peaceful night and a perfect end. Amen.

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know thee as thou art revealed in Scripture and the breaking of the bread. Grant this for the sake of thy love. Amen.

From Daily Evening Prayer: Rite Two, Book of Common Prayer⁴⁴

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake. Amen.

From an Order for Compline: Book of Common Prayer⁴⁵

Guide us waking, O Lord, and guard us sleeping; that awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace.

From an Order for Compline: Book of Common Prayer⁴⁶

I will lie down and sleep in peace,
For you alone, O Lord,
Make me dwell in safety.

Psalm 4:8

⁴⁴ Ibid., 209-210

⁴⁵ Ibid., 210

⁴⁶ Ibid., 210

May God support us all the day long
Till the shadows lengthen
and the busy world is hushed
and the fever of life is done.
Then, in God's mercy
May God grant us a safe lodging,
and a holy rest
and peace at last.

John Henry Cardinal Newman⁴⁷

When I awake, I am still with you.

Psalm 139:18 NIV

I think of you on my bed,
And meditate on you in the watches of the night.
Psalm 63:6

I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
In the night also my heart instructs me.
Psalm 16:7

As a member of a Benedictine community I have been blessed by the practice of honoring “the hours” through conscious pausing for prayer at specific times of the day. When I speak of the hours I am referring to those times of the day that the earth’s turning offers us: midnight, dawn, midmorning, noon, midafternoon, evening, and night. Although every hour is sacred, these special times have been hallowed by centuries of devotion and prayer.⁴⁸

When I pray the gospels, it is crystal clear that Jesus had a rhythm of prayer in his life. He lived mindfully. We see him withdrawing from the apostles and from his crowds of followers. He takes time for solitude at critical moments in his life. He goes away at significant times of the day — dawn, for example. Sometimes he spends the whole night in prayer. He seeks out lonely places where he can be silent and in communion with God. Often he slips away at crucial times of strife or moments when decisions need to be made, yet he always returns to his ministry of compassion and love among the people.⁴⁹

“At midnight I rise to give you thanks ...” we proclaim in Psalm 119:62, and in verse 164 of the same psalm we pray, “seven times a day I praise you ...”⁵⁰

I believe that the word *practice* is one of the most important words in the spiritual life. If you want to be a dancer, a pianist, a singer, a figure skater, you practice. If you want to make the team in any area of sports, you practice. Just imagine the many hours of practice given over to those who make it to the Olympics. Why should the spiritual life be any different? We practice pausing to remember the sacredness of our names, who we are, and what we plan on doing with the incredible gift of our lives — and how we can learn to be in the midst of so much *doing*. We have to practice loving and forgiving. We practice breathing and being careful with one another’s life. We practice nonviolence. We practice enjoying what we have rather than storing up possessions. We practice silence⁵¹.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 210.

⁴⁸ Macrina Wiederkehr, *Sevensacredpauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day*, (Green Press Initiative, 2008), 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 13-14.

“Reverence each hour
As a small stepping stone
On your pilgrimage
Through the day.
Receive the gift
Of seven sacred pauses.
Practice waking up
Seven times a day”.

Macrina Wiederkehr⁵²

“And I said to the one who stood at the gate of the year, “Give me a light that I may tread safely into the Unknown.” And he replied, “Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

Minnie Haskins⁵³

Dawn breaks through night shadows. Fading darkness makes way for morning light. Golden rays exchange places with shining stars. All of nature leaps from the tomb of sleep and death. Everything stirs with renewed life. It is the hour of joy — a little resurrection. Rising from sleep, I raise high the chalice of my life. Dressed in robes of joyful anticipation, I enter this day with an open heart. This is the awakening hour. This is the hour of praise. “O medicine of dawn; O healing drink of morning!” Offering both words and silence, I join in the dance of creation. What will this day be like? Will I choose to walk through the hours mindfully?⁵⁴

Morning is a call to our own resurrection, and so we reflect on what needs to rise in us.⁵⁵

“Moment before dawn
quietest of all quiet moments,
good medicine for the soul,
make plans to be there.

Set the clock of your heart,
Breathe in the rays of dawn,
Raise high the chalice of your life
Taste the joy of being awake.

Macrina Wiederkehr⁵⁶

“To affect the quality of the day is the highest of arts.”

Henry David Thoreau⁵⁷

“Isn’t it a splendid thing that there are mornings?”

Anne of Green Gables⁵⁸

Thomas Merton said, “To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence.” The choice is really not difficult to comprehend. We can either choose to succumb to the outer and inner violence that we are now living in or choose to live in a different way — right here and right now.⁵⁹

⁵² Ibid, 17.

⁵³ Ibid, 42.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 47.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 49.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 57

⁵⁷ Ibid, 66

⁵⁸ Ibid, 67

⁵⁹ Stephen W. Smith, *Soul Custody: Choosing to Care for the One and Only You*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 17.

Caring for your soul is never a selfish or egotistical act. In fact, caring for your soul is the opposite of being narcissistic. It is really an act of stewardship. We steward our souls by caring for them well. How can we continually give what we do not have? Caring for the soul is an act through which God can replenish your heart, restore your soul, and revive your day so you can meet the challenges of life, work, and relationships. Far from being labeled as sin, soul care is actually a biblical command.

- Proverbs 4:23: “Above all else, guard your heart. For it is the wellspring of life.”
- Deuteronomy 4:9 (ESV): “Only take care, and keep your soul diligently.”
- 1 Timothy 4:16: “Watch your life and doctrine closely.”⁶⁰

Eugene Peterson uses a phrase that is revealing when it comes to caring for our souls. Peterson calls it being “able to marshal and direct our energies wisely”. It’s a paraphrase expression for one of the fruits of the Spirit. We’re familiar with it as “self-control” (Gal. 5:23). Caring for your soul is just this: marshaling your energies wisely to live and enjoy life. It’s deciding what is important, making space in your life for what really matters.⁶¹

It’s interesting to note that our word *scholastic* is rooted in the Greek word *schola*, which means “free time.” The Greeks knew what we must learn. All learning does not happen in rows of school desks or packed church pews. Learning involves ample time that is lingering, unstructured, and unprogrammed — *schola*.⁶²

We can start off so well and yet end so tragically. John captures in memorable language the danger of this threat to our souls when he relays the Lord’s message to a body of believers in a town called Laodicea.

I see what you've done, your hard, hard work, your refusal to quit. I know you can't stomach evil, that you weed out apostolic pretenders. I know your persistence, your courage in my cause, that you never wear out.

But you walked away from your first love — why? What's going on with you, anyway? Do you have any idea how far you've fallen? A Lucifer fall! Turn back! Recover your dear early love. (Rev. 2:3-5)

Losing our heartbeat for God is walking away from our first love with Jesus.⁶³

The world’s wisest man during his generation, Solomon, shared some wise words about rhythm.

*There's an opportune time to do things, a right time
For everything on the earth:
A right time for birth and another for death,
A right time to plant and another to reap
A right time to kill and another to heal,
A right time to destroy and another to construct,
A right time to cry and another to laugh
A right time to lament and another to cheer
A right time to make love and another to abstain,
A right time to embrace and another to part,
A right time to search and another to count your losses,
A right time to hold on and another to let go,
A right time to rip out and another to mend,
Right time to shut up and another to speak up,
A right time to love and another to hate,
A right time to wage war and another to make peace. Eccl. 3:18 MSG*

⁶⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁶¹ Ibid., 32.

⁶² Ibid., 54.

⁶³ Ibid., 67-68.

What rhythm allows us to ask ourselves is this: What time is it for my soul right now? What does my soul need at this particular time? Living with this question and having the courage to ask it repeatedly of ourselves and those we love helps create a redeemed culture that chooses life over drivenness, recovery over burnout, and serenity over perpetual anxiety.⁶⁴

"We can get so busy doing urgent things and so preoccupied with what comes next that we don't experience now. Afraid of being late, we rush from the past to the future. The present moment becomes a crack between what we did and what we have yet to do. It is virtually lost to us. We don't get to our futures many faster if we hurry. And we certainly don't become better people in haste. More likely than not, the faster we go the less we become".⁶⁵

Dallas Willard was asked, "What is the secret to the Christian life?" He responded, "Ruthlessly eradicate hurry from your life."

This is a prophetic call to stand up against culture's values and seek to live in a way that honors God and the soul. The apostle Paul offers us this challenge when he says,

*Here's what I want you to do, God helping you:
Take your everyday, ordinary life —your sleeping,
eating going-to-work, and walking-around life —
and place it before God as an offering. Embracing
what God does for you is the best thing you can
do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your
culture that you fit into it without even thinking.
Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be
changed from the inside out. Readily recognize
what he wants from you, and quickly respond to
it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging
you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the
best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in
you. (Rom. 12:1-2 MSG)⁶⁶*

"Developing resilience is demanding, mostly done in secret, often humbling, not always fun".⁶⁷

During that time of midlife assessment, Gail and I came to an uncomfortable conclusion about our own relationship. While we loved each other and believed our marriage to be sound and enduring, the fact was that it lacked something. We came to see that when our children left home, we allowed our lives to become too serious, too much defined by our work. We liked most of the things we were doing, but the fact was that there was less laughter, less play, and less time to ... linger with each other or friends. This blind spot had cost us dearly.⁶⁸

Henri Nouwen was thinking about this when he said, "Most Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead. Many Christian empire-builders have been people unable to give and receive love."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Ibid, 90-91.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 92.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 93.

⁶⁷ Gordon MacDonald, *A Resilient Life: You Can Move Ahead No Matter What*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2004), 20.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 204.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 212.

