

Takin' Care of Busyness¹

Every Wednesday, my wife goes to school as she aims at a Master's degree in education. While she listens to some esteemed university professor with lots of initials after his name, I am tutored by the wisest of all teachers—my three-year-old daughter, Lindsey.

Last week she gave a particularly brilliant lecture. I had planned a packed agenda for the day. The way I had it drawn up in my PalmPilot, we'd play Go Fish, hit the swing set, catch a bite for supper, and then cap it off with an hour at the pool. Much to my dismay, however, Lindsey couldn't get past our Go Fish game.

"Go, honey! It's your turn," I prompted.

"Wait!" she said, allowing herself to get distracted with an impromptu ballerina dance in the middle of the game. "Dee-da-dee-da-dee-dee-dum."

"Lindsey!" My veins were bulging, transforming my neck into a road map. "You asked me for a yak. I don't have it, so you have to go fish. Now go fish."

"Wait, Daddy! I'm doing a dance. Dee-da-dee-da-dee—"

"Lindsey! Sit down here and go fish. Hurry!"

That's when my miniature professor asked me a very profound



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question. The question still hounds me. She asked, “Why, Daddy?”

I flunked her quiz. The question was so simple, yet it stumped me. I tried to answer but found myself asking the same question. Why did I insist on hurrying? Was it really that important to get through the game so we could go play on the swing set, scarf down supper, and then race to the pool? Was swinging or swimming any more worthwhile than spontaneously dancing? What’s so holy about hurry anyway?

John O’Neil observes:

Many people look at an overfull schedule as a badge of importance or popularity. For them, a heavily annotated calendar says, *Look at how important I am! How in demand! How many people and events depend on me!* An inflated ego is speaking. Self-inflation turns a busy life into a frantic one, testing our stamina, creating a lopsided set of priorities and values. Private time becomes a commodity so precious that we “save” it like something bankable. A man I know boasts that he needs fewer bathroom breaks during long meetings than any of his associates. Meyer Friedman, co-author of *Type A Behavior and Your Heart*, tells of a patient who made his meals in a blender so that he could save the time it takes to chew. An industrialist I know scheduled a fifteen-minute visit to his son’s birthday.²

I can relate. One of my toughest struggles is taking care of busyness. I jitter like a humming bird on speed. I rush and race and run to do more. That’s just the mad world that we live in, right? As Richard Swenson observes: “We send packages by Federal Express, use a long distance company called Sprint, manage our finances on Quicken, schedule our appointments on a Dayrunner, diet with Slim-Fast and swim in trunks made by Speedo.”³ Consequently, we live in a world of weary folk.

Mind you, it’s not the kind of weary that can be cured by a good night’s sleep. Nor is it the kind of weary that comes from strenuous exercise. Rather, it is a weariness of the soul. It is a fatigue of the spirit that prevents us from reaching our full spiritual potential. In our hurry

we fail to love and trust God fully. We miss out on the joy of the kingdom—but not because we defy God. We are simply too fatigued, hurried, and preoccupied to follow Him. If Satan cannot make us curse God, he is content to make our lives so busy and unfocused that we skim in our devotion to the Lord.

Soul fatigue creates people who are always running, always behind, wishy-washy, superficial, disconnected from God, and too tired to care. We live in a world that pushes people into this way of life that does not make sense.

This was never God's design for His kids. There is a better way to do life. According to the prophet Isaiah, there is a source of healing to all who feel faint and spent.

The source of healing for soul fatigue

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless (*Isaiah 40:28, 29, NRSV*).

Some years ago I registered with my friend Roger for a mini-triathlon. While the biking and jogging seemed doable, the swimming segment felt like an attempt to cross the Grand Canyon on a pogo stick. "It's only a quarter of a mile," Roger explained. "You couldn't drown if you tried."

"But, Roger, people drown in the bathtub."

"Sure, but that's different. They aren't competing."

"Huh?"

"Trust me, it's different."

"OK. It's different."

Next thing I knew we were diving into the frigid waters of Moses Lake. To survive among a thousand other swimmers I practiced my version of hydro Tae-Bo. After what seemed like the melting of an ice



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age, I finally carved a wake around the final buoy and thrashed toward shore. Collapsing on the sand, I looked up at Roger peering over me. I seemed to be hallucinating because his hair was dry. “Did you swim?” I asked. “Or was I so slow that you had time to go home and blow-dry your hair?”

“I went swimming,” he smirked. “I walked right next to you the whole way. The water was never more than about four feet deep.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I wanted to, but it was too comical to watch you almost drown.”

“You mean I almost drowned in water no deeper than my chest?”

“If it makes you feel any better, the water was deeper than your bathtub.”

How often do we thrash and kick and panic, clamoring to survive, when the Source of Peace walks right beside us? *“The LORD . . . gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.”*

Soul fatigue was never God’s plan for your life. He is the Source of healing for every person who feels weary and worn. This is good news, for who is better qualified for this role? After all, Jesus never felt worried or frantic. Remember the story in Mark 4, when Jesus and His friends were caught in a squall? The disciples panicked—but not Jesus. He simply commanded the storm, “Pipe down.” Jesus felt all my human emotions—sorrow, joy, pain, anger, hope—except for one. He never worried. God is never in a hurry. He never panics.

It’s good to remember that we have a God who is the Source of healing for all soul fatigue. This can breathe hope into every human spirit because we all wrestle with soul fatigue. Notice Isaiah’s description of the universal scope of this condition.

The scope of soul fatigue

“Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted” (Isaiah 40:30, NRSV).

Isaiah suggests that everyone is vulnerable to this condition of the spirit. Even youth feel the creeping menace of soul fatigue. Ever since the dawn of sin, humankind has felt this hunger of the heart. Ironically,

in our age of plenty we are hungrier than ever when it comes to issues of the soul.

David Green, editor-at-large of *U.S. News & World Report*, writes:

Men and women today are haunted by a sense that in the midst of plenty, our lives seem barren. We are hungry for a greater nourishment of the soul. In the England of today, a businessman turned philosopher, Charles Handy, has won a widespread following with his writing. Capitalism, he argues, delivers the means but not the point of life. Now that we are satisfying our outer needs, we must pay more attention to those within—for beauty, spiritual growth, and human connection. “In Africa,” Handy writes, “they say there are two hungers . . . The lesser hunger is for the things that sustain life, the goods and services, and the money to pay for them, which we all need. The greater hunger is for an answer to the question ‘why?’ for some understanding of what life is for.”

In AD 1000, people could never truly satisfy their lesser hunger, but history suggests they were pretty good at fulfilling their greater one. Their lives were richer for it, and so were those that followed. A millennium later, our situation seems just the reverse. Is this really where we want to be? Or can we learn something from those poor folks, after all?⁴

The solution for soul fatigue

So what is the solution for soul fatigue? In a word, Isaiah claims the solution is to wait.

“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 40:31, NRSV).

Those who *wait* for the Lord shall be renewed. But waiting does not come naturally to most of us. I hate to wait. I don't like it when my telephone conversation is interrupted with “Oops, I got another call.



Can you wait a second?" I don't like waiting at the airport. I don't like being at a stoplight sitting behind some accelerator-challenged driver when the light turns green. Waiting is not my spiritual gift.

Yet much of life is about waiting.

There's the waiting of the single person to see if God might have a partner in mind for him or her.

There's the waiting of a childless couple that yearns to start a family, but their prayer goes unanswered.

There's the waiting of somebody who longs to have work that seems to matter, but it doesn't happen.

There's the waiting of a deeply depressed person who hopes that he or she will wake up one morning with a desire to live, but that morning never seems to come.

There's the waiting of a spouse who is trapped in an abusive marriage that feels so hopeless.

There's the waiting of an elderly senior citizen in a nursing home for the mercy of death.

Listen to Lewis Smedes, from his book *Standing on the Promises*: "Waiting is our destiny as creatures who cannot by themselves bring about what they hope for. We wait in the darkness for a flame we cannot light, we wait in fear for a happy ending we cannot write. We wait for a not yet that feels like a not ever. Waiting is the hardest work of hope."⁵

In a word, it is God's solution for soul fatigue. Rather than rushing and hurrying and manipulating the circumstances of life, we are instructed to wait. Even though it is the hardest work of hope.

In Henri Nouwen's book *Sabbatical Journeys*, he writes about some friends of his who were trapeze artists. These circus performers called themselves the Flying Rodleighs. They told Nouwen of the special relationship between the flyer and the catcher on the trapeze. The flyer is the one who lets go, and the catcher is the one who catches. As you might imagine, that's a real important relationship—especially to the flyer. When the flyer is swinging high above the crowd on the trapeze, the moment comes when he must let go. As he arches in the air his job is to remain as still as possible and wait for the strong hands of the

catcher to pluck him from the air. This trapeze artist told Nouwen, "The flyer must never try to catch the catcher. He must wait in absolute trust."⁶ The catcher will catch him, but he must wait.

Perhaps you know that vulnerable feeling of waiting. You have let go of what it is that God has asked you to let go of, but you can't feel His hand catching you right now and you want to start flailing around. Will you just wait in absolute trust?

Wait on the Lord. For those who wait on 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."*

Sometimes, Isaiah says, when you wait on the Lord you will soar with wings like eagles. What a magnificent picture! An eagle's wings are capable of catching rising currents of warm air, thermal winds that catapult the bird to speeds of eighty miles an hour. Without moving a feather, in breathtaking majesty, an eagle can soar to great heights.

For all who wait upon the Lord there will be seasons of soaring, times when you catch a gust of the Spirit. Jesus said, *"The wind blows wherever it pleases. . . . So it is with everyone born of the Spirit"* (John 3:8). Perhaps you are in an era of spiritual soaring right now. You find yourself borne up by God's power. God is shaping your life in extravagant and generous ways. He is granting you power to rise above temptation, flooding you with strength and wisdom beyond your ability. You're just soaring right now. If that's your condition, be very grateful. Do all you can do to stay in the stream of the Spirit's power. Never assume that you're soaring on your own strength.

Maybe you are not soaring. Instead you are running. Your spiritual journey is not effortless, but you are running the race. You're on course. You feel frustration, but you also feel God's pleasure in your obedience. If that's you, then keep running—faithfully following, serving, submitting, and giving. In God's own words, you *"shall run and not be weary."*

But there is a third line. Perhaps it is all you can do to *"walk and not faint."* Maybe your prayer goes something like this: "God, I don't feel very strong right now. I feel disconnected from You. I am wounded and



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weariness. My soul is fatigued. But God, I will not let go. I will hang on to You, and I will just keep walking.”

Wherever you find yourself these days, Jesus understands. He knows all about it. He knows about soaring. Think, for example, of the time He spoke the word and the tomb of His friend Lazarus filled with light. Or do you remember when the seventy-two disciples returned with glowing stories of the demons they trampled in God’s name? How about the time Jesus stood on the Mount of Transfiguration? I think Jesus soared on those days.

But Jesus didn’t always soar. He often encountered nasty obstacles in His mission on earth. His followers, for the most part, were disciple-challenged. When He faced resistance from the church leaders, Jesus just stayed the course. When Satan tempted Him in the wilderness, Jesus kept running.

But then the time came to climb a cross at Calvary. Jesus wasn’t soaring on that day. When the cross was heaved on His bleeding back, He didn’t scamper up The Way of the Skull. Although He was a young man, He stumbled and fell on that day. But He kept walking.

Sometimes walking is all you can do, but that’s enough. In the hour when soul fatigue is most intense, it is enough to say, “God, I won’t quit. Right now my life makes no sense, but I’ll wait on You.”

Do you ever feel entangled in a life of hurry that makes no sense? Are you consumed in busyness? Is your heart stressed? Your soul fatigued?

Then wait. Wait upon the Lord.

1. I am indebted for the inspiration of this chapter to two of John Ortberg’s sermons: “Overcoming Soul Fatigue” (M9832), and “Waiting on God” (C9850) (South Barrington, Ill.: Seeds Tape Ministry, a ministry of Willow Creek Community Church, 1998).

2. John R. O’Neil, *The Paradox of Success* (New York: Putnam, 1993), 109.

3. As quoted by John Ortberg in the sermon, “Overcoming Soul Fatigue,” preached on August 8, 1998, at Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois.

4. *U.S. News & World Report*, August 16-23, 1999, x.

5. Lewis Smedes, *Standing on the Promises* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 41, 42.

6. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journeys* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), viii.

