

CHAPTER 9, SESSION 9: HOW TO MAKE A PICKLE

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

The author points out that hurry sickness is the number one enemy of the spiritual life, and it is rampant in our culture. The challenge that many people face with this chapter is that there are no easy answers. As the author admits, we are choosing between good and better, not good and evil. Participants may raise questions about their own priorities and choices, to which there are no easy answers. As the leader, avoid trying to give answers, but instead guide participants deeper. Ask them to explore their priorities, their choices, their motivations and most importantly how the Spirit might be guiding them. In the midst of such questions we grow deeper in our relationship with God, which is what matters most.

SUPPLIES

🔔 A chime or bell for the “Experiencing Transformation” exercise.

WELCOME

Recite ALL of Colossians 3:1-17 together, then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

Patient and loving God, when you want to make a squash you take six months, when you want to make an oak tree you take one hundred years. You created us, O Lord, to be eternal spiritual beings, more immense than we could ever imagine. Stretch out our arms to embrace the rhythm and pace that you have created the universe to operate at. Through our reading and discussion today and through the on-going practices of our faith may we be healed of hurry sickness. Amen.

SOUL-TRAINING [15-20 minutes]

Divide into small groups of three or four and spend 10 to 15 minutes discussing your experience of slowing down. Use these reflection questions to help your conversation.

1. Slowing down is countercultural in our day. Describe the challenges you encountered. Will you keep trying to slow down in the future?
2. How would you describe the level of hurry in your life? What impact is the hurry in your life having on your relationship with God and others?
3. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercises?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25-45 minutes]

THE BIG IDEA IN THIS CHAPTER: To live an authentic and effective Christian life, we must slow the pace of our lives and become aware of the present moment.

MAIN POINTS

- 🔔 Most of us live under the tyranny of the urgent; a constant sense that we must be doing more in order to be effective.
- 🔔 We equate effectiveness and productivity with personal worth and value, which is a great lie.
- 🔔 Thanks to clocks and other machines, we live as if time is running out, so we had better be as efficient as possible.
- 🔔 Humans are not machines, but unfortunately that is the dominant narrative in our culture.

- ☞ Technology was supposed to increase our leisure but has decreased it because we have added more to our schedules.
- ☞ We will not accomplish anything in our spiritual life by hurrying. Jesus lived a perfect life of balance between rest and action.
- ☞ We must ruthlessly eliminate hurry in our lives if we are to be effective apprentices of Jesus.
- ☞ If we stop, look and listen, we will find the provision of God in all kinds of unexpected places—even in our backyards.
- ☞ Not only must we slow down, we must also realize that growth is a slow process.
- ☞ Making an apprentice is like making a pickle—both have to soak a long time, one in brine, the other in the narratives and practices of Jesus.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The first part of the chapter (pp. 173-79) explores how our view of time evolved into the “tyranny of the urgent” and even regarding humanity as a machine designed to produce tasks with efficiency. Discuss your experiences of being in the workplace and the expectations placed on your performance.
2. The author reminds us that, “we cannot love, think, eat, laugh or pray in a hurry” (p. 180).
 - ☞ Looking back over the last week, what did you attempt to do in a hurry that can’t be done in a hurry?
 - ☞ When did you slow down and experience some of the blessings that come from slowing down?
3. “Too many of us are trying to serve God without listening to God. There will be time to serve, but listening to Jesus always takes precedence” (p. 181). Why do you think we are tempted to serve God without listening to God? What impact do your old narratives about God have on your need to be busy with God-work?
4. The author gives us this illustration from A. H. Strong: “A student asked the President of his school whether he could not take a shorter course than the one prescribed. ‘Oh yes,’ replied the President, ‘but then it depends on what you want to be. When God wants to make an oak, He takes a hundred years, but when He wants to make a squash, He takes six months.’ Strong goes on to explain that spiritual growth, in addition to being slow, is also not uniform. Some years we may experience tremendous growth, and some we see very little change. An oak tree has only a couple of months of actual growth each year in terms of measurable expansion, says Strong. The rest of the year, the other ten months, are spent solidifying that growth” (p. 186).
 - ☞ Reflecting on your spiritual journey over the last year, when have you experienced growth and when have you experienced solidifying?
 - ☞ How about the last five and/or ten years?

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD [15-20 minutes]

Read aloud Luke 10:38-42.

We are often tempted to view Martha and Mary as having two personality types: Martha is the active busybody and Mary is the contemplative. But based on the author’s insights we can see that the issue is not their personalities, it is the choices they made at that particular moment: Martha chose to serve, while Mary chose to listen.

- ☞ *What are the ways that you regularly listen to Jesus?*
- ☞ *What activities tempt you away from those times of listening?*
- ☞ *Name specific ways you as a group can support and encourage each other to continue listening to Jesus.*

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [15-20 minutes]

Slowing Down—Practicing the Presence—Observing the Features of the World

Begin by reading this quote from the chapter:

Why is eliminating hurry from our lives so crucial? When we eliminate hurry we become present, or more specifically, present to the present moment, in all of its glory. We become aware of our surroundings. We see colors, and smell smells; we hear hushed sounds and can actually feel the wind in our faces. In short, we “show up” and experience the fullness of life. And that includes, not least of all, being present to God. If I am to live well as a Christian, I need to be constantly connected to God. Hurry is not part of a well-lived life (p. 183).

The author points out that hurry is an “inner condition that is fear-based” (p. 183). Our fear is motivated by the belief that our happiness or success depends on our performance. As we speed up we become “blind” to the “sacred theater” of life. To help us taste what life could be like, we will spend 20 minutes combining three very simple spiritual practices: slowing down, practicing the presence of God, and observing the features of the world. In various ways we have engaged in all three of these practices during the course of the study. Now we will bring them together and experience them as a group. Here’s how it will work.

We will take 20 minutes to slow down and savor our surroundings, and, as we do so, we will occasionally remind ourselves that God is walking with us. To begin, spend one or two minutes being still and breathing deeply. Allow your body to relax. Then spend a few minutes remembering and feeling “Christ dwelling within you.” This is your touchstone. Return to this feeling whenever it crosses your mind or you begin to feel a sense of hurry.

Once you feel somewhat centered, begin to walk leisurely through your surroundings. Just as Jacob in the coffee shop noticed things he had never seen before, so, too, you are invited to simply notice things you have never seen before. With each feature you discover, savor it with Jesus, knowing that Jesus is with you, enjoying the very world he created!

When 20 minutes have passed, I will chime a bell to call you back together. That way you don’t even have to wear your watch! If any of you don’t come back, we’ll come looking for you.

Once everyone has regrouped, explore questions such as these:

- ☞ What new things did you discover?
- ☞ If you sensed Jesus’ presence during this time, what did you notice about Jesus?
- ☞ What inner struggles did you experience during the practice?
- ☞ Is this a practice you could engage in again?

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Share this quote from the book to end your time together:

When hurried, we cannot experience life at its fullest; nor can we come into contact with our true selves, our real feelings. And even more important, we outrun God. When we slow down we allow ourselves to be found; found by life and found by God. When we practice slowing down, we are moving into the rhythm of God. When we eliminate hurry (our part, in response to God’s gracious call to the deeper life), the Spirit comes alongside us and strengthens us (pp. 183-184).

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Remind the group that your next gathering will be two hours long and will be a celebration of completing the first book! Confirm the time and location and coordination if the group is going to bring snacks and beverages.