

IN THE JETSTREAM

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Our Growth and God's Timing

by Shea Oakley



“Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.” Proverbs 19:2 ESV

We work in an industry that sells speed of travel as one of its primary attractions. Yet the very thing that makes commercial aviation so important today, and our jobs possible, is part of a larger societal trend that threatens to warp our understanding of how to best live the Christian life. Airlines are, among other things, all about getting somewhere as fast as possible, but our God does not necessarily share our culture's obsession with speed.

The Influence of Modern Day Tempo

The tempo of contemporary life has had a deep influence on Christians. In a profound sense many believers are nearly as caught up in getting things as soon as possible as are those in the secular world around them. This is perhaps reflected most clearly in our love affair with technology. From the microwave oven to the internet, we have sought to erase the need for time. Everything must be now; everything must be instantaneous. The rhythm of life has today become a staccato. Befitting our identity as the original “instant gratification” society we have, at least in the West, seemed to have made a virtue out of impatience.

This aspect of 21st century culture has penetrated the Church in the tendency for many believers to expect spiritual growth overnight. From a biblical perspective, though, sanctification does not appear to be a process operating at jet speed. Salvation may be an instantaneous event, but nothing in the Word of God hints at spiritual maturity coming into being that way. No one becomes a perfected saint without grace and truth being moderated by time. In the haste we Christians share with our secular fellow travelers we have forgotten that the Inventor of time has not, even with the advent of human technology, ceased to use time. There are no “10 Easy Steps to Spiritual Maturity.” God never intended the journey to be that easy, or short.

Caught Up in a Cycle

Many believers today are caught in a cycle of frustration. Maybe this is because we often hear messages that imply

two things. The first is that we are not where we should be. Now this is not always a bad thing to be told. There is always room for growth in our walk with God, but it is also true that we cannot arrive at perfection, at least experientially, in this life. That will have to wait until we are face to face with our Lord. The problem is that the tone of “we are not where we need to be” messages sometimes communicate not only that we are not where we should be, but that we should also be approaching panic because of it. Grace to grow at our own slower pace, which just might be God's pace, may not be part of such a message.

Reaching Our Spiritual Goal

The second implication in some current Christian teaching is that we can accelerate our growth if we take whatever the approach is that the teacher has. Sometimes, for instance, the not-so-subtle inference is that we can reach whatever the spiritual goal of the moment is immediately if we simply repent of our lack of faith. The problem, we are told, is that we don't believe God will fulfill that goal in a moment if we confidently expect Him to. This message, frankly, is dangerous. Why? Because God does not expect us to grow faster than He designed us to grow, in His perfect will and timing. It is similar to the idea of expecting a Giant Redwood tree sapling to grow to its mature height of 200 feet overnight, rather than over hundreds of years. God does not hold the sapling accountable to do that. Why would it when He, in divine wisdom, created the tree to grow at a much slower speed?

Both these messages are influenced less by Scripture than by how much we have embraced the values of our culture. We want spiritual growth, and we want it now, just as we might want money, pleasure, respect, and any number of other things now. The amount of lottery tickets Christians buy is a mute testimony to this fact. What we are setting ourselves up for is frustration and disappointment. The sad thing is people who claim to know God (and the author includes himself here) should know better.

The Answer

There is an answer, and it involves a form of

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repentance. Christians can decide to opt out of the manic pace of a culture that they are supposed to be in, but not of. It should first be affirmed here that nowhere in the Bible do we find some kind of blanket condemnation of time-saving technology (like the jetliners we fly). God has gifted the crown of His creation with the ability to invent, to create instrumentalities that can improve the quality of our lives in various ways. Yet He has also warned us not to depend too greatly on the works of our hands, or to let them define the pace of our lives.

Grace to Grow

So, we need to cultivate an intentionally counter-cultural resistance to speed for the sake of speed. We can start by giving ourselves the grace to grow at the pace to which our Lord ordained us rather than what others might tell us it should be. Those in our midst who have "hung a cross" around a modern obsession with what was once called hyperactivity should

perhaps be challenged to rethink their approach to the Christian life.

Voices need to be raised in affirmation of God's sovereignty over time and against our attempts to speed up sanctification according to human timetables rather than His. We can legitimately take a surgeon's knife to our daily lives and cut out what is wedded to an earthly obsession with haste. This might result in a lowered standard of living for some, as they seek to do less and live more attuned to God's perspective on time, but it can also liberate them from a life lived out of step with the perfect tempo of Jesus Christ. The result of that kind of change may well be a blessed sigh of relief from believers who have been unnecessarily pressured into ungodly, and unhealthy, haste. We will lose nothing in doing this, but the self-inflicted misery that comes with trying to live up to human expectations rather than God's. ■

This article was written by Shea Oakley. Shea is Primary Contributor for FCAP Social Media and also serves on our Advisory Board.

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