

EDITORIAL: Hurriedly trusting God's 'slow work'

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Do you ever feel like you're living a "microwave life"? You know you're too rushed when you program the microwave oven to heat your leftovers and you stand in the kitchen thinking, "Why won't this blasted thing heat faster?" Seems like we're always in a rush.

That's why I conducted a little experiment. On a Sunday at church and a Monday at the Texas Baptist Executive Board meeting, I paid attention to how often the word "busy" or its equivalent came up in conversation. Over and over, friends and acquaintances mentioned the frenetic, harried pace of their lives.

Editor Marv Knox

We live in a culture that demands speed and nonstop activity. This is a factor in almost every phase of life. It impacts students, young adults starting careers, parents of growing children, middle-agers sandwiched between children and aging parents and jobs, and even senior adults who could be expected to control their calendars and the pace of their days. Most of us wear our busy-ness as a badge of honor, or at least validation of self-worth.

The cost, of course, is enormous. Just consider how many friends have drifted off your relationship radar, simply because neither of you "had time" for the other. Think about important family occasions—such as evening meals—that you missed completely or rushed through because of other supposedly pressing duties.

This carries over into our spiritual lives, doesn't it? I'll confess that's true in my life. How often do work, or your to-do list or even church duties crowd

out quiet time alone with God—reading the Bible, praying and listening?

Beyond that, how often do we try to force God to work on our highlighted and over-regulated timetable? Raise your hand if you've been frustrated because God failed to complete the assignments you deemed divine on your timetable. I'm preaching to myself here, but I'd guess there's a better-than-even chance you know exactly what I mean.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, much of God's best work totally defies human clockwork. Repeatedly throughout my life, I've experienced frustration with God's slow pace. Occasionally, like Abraham and Sarah, I've taken God's work into my own hands, only to fail miserably. And then, in God's own time, the Lord provided answers to my anguished prayers that exceeded all imagination. A good work could have developed according to my timeline; the best work developed slowly according to God's plan.

Take comfort in realizing the I-want-it-done-now vs. God's-own-time struggle is not a 21st century phenomenon. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit paleontologist, biologist and philosopher who lived from 1881 to 1955, addressed this in a lovely poem titled "The Slow Work of God." A friend shared it with me, and I want you to experience it:

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything

to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way

to something unknown, something new.

Yet it is the law of all progress that is made

*by passing through some stages of instability
and that may take a very long time.*

And so I think it is with you.

Your ideas mature gradually. Let them grow.

Let them shape themselves without haste.

Do not try to force them on

as though you could be today what time

—that is to say, grace—and circumstances

acting on your own good will

will make you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new Spirit

gradually forming in you will be.

Give our Lord the benefit of believing

that his hand is leading you,

and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself

in suspense and incomplete.

Above all, trust in the slow work of God,

our loving vine-dresser. Amen.

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