

When Your Life is Breathless

Gary R. Collins

Almost everybody agrees: we're all too busy. For a lot of people life is like running on a treadmill. The pace never stops and neither, it seems, do the demands. We tear into our days, trying to do more than is humanly possible during any 24-hour period, then we beat ourselves up when we don't get everything done.

It wasn't supposed to be like that. Only a few years ago we were told that VCRs, FAX machines, cellular phones, and a host of other time-saving and labor-saving devices would simplify our lives and give us abundant leisure time. Instead, technology has helped us squeeze more into our time-starved lives so that most of us run around feeling breathless. As a result, our bodies are drained, our spiritual lives are neglected, our work is inefficient, and our relationships are superficial.

Coping

As life has become more hectic, we have found creative ways to cope. We've learned multitasking, trying to do several things at the same time—like sorting mail and grabbing lunch while we talk on the phone. Some have turned to downshifting—moving to smaller houses, getting rid of their extra “stuff,” and trying to live more simply. At some time, most of us try various forms of time management. We attend time-management seminars, get time-management calendars, and carry big notebooks designed to better organize our lives. Many of these methods help, but sometimes they teach us to fit more into our overloaded days so that life becomes more complex and stretched to the limit.

Jesus had busy days, but his life was never hectic. In Mark 1:21-39 we read about a day when he taught in the synagogue, dealt with a man controlled by demons, and healed all the sick among the crowd when a whole town-full of people gathered at his door. Next morning he went to a lonely place to meet with his Father but his friends interrupted this solitude and urged him to hurry back to where “everybody” was looking for him. Instead, Jesus calmly resisted the pressure and announced that he had decided to go somewhere else. Did his time alone in prayer help him to set boundaries and establish priorities so he wasn't swept along with the demands of the crowds?

A Life Well-Lived

Time-management plans can help us deal with busy lifestyles, but it is equally important to pull back from the demands and take a hard look at our lives. When we determine to have lives that are well-lived, we can set priorities and be less pressured by the demands of our calendars, our friends, or our self-created frenzied schedules. There are at least 10 marks of a well-lived, less hectic life.

1. Spiritual Passion. Even when he might have been tired, Jesus pulled away for time with God the Father. He knew the value of solitude, focusing on what really counts in life and praying before he launched into his busy activities.

2. Compassionate Caregiving. When Jesus told us to love our neighbors like we love ourselves, he was giving us a prin-

ciple for living. Sometimes it hurts to care for others and it eats up time, but when we are sensitive to others we are forced to pull away from our busy schedules and keep our priorities in balance.

3. Building Character. What are your most important values? Are you living in accordance with these characteristics? Integrity, for example, involves deciding what is right and doing it. If we determine to live lives of integrity, we are better able to decide on what needs to be done and what should be dropped from our calendars.

4. Balance. How do we keep our lives in equilibrium? This involves keeping the right mix of time for family, work, worship, and relaxation. Sometimes we have to fight to keep all of these in our lives. If we don't work at keeping balance, one part of life (like work) can dominate everything else. Don't forget to give yourself permission to take the time for recreation. Then do it.

5. Purpose. Here's a tough question: Why do you even exist? You might think about this question with the help of some friends or a counselor. Ask what you do best, what interests you most, what abilities and skills you have, what you care about deeply. Then try to focus more of your time on these activities. Sometimes, of course, your job or your family prevent you from following your dreams and passions, at least temporarily, but a focus on life purpose helps us keep everything else in balance.

6. Teamwork. We cannot expect to have lives that are well-lived and free from pressure if we are lone rangers who try to make things happen on our own. Remember God did not call any one person to do everything. Even Jesus chose 12 disciples to carry out his work.

7. Adaptability. It isn't easy to adjust to change. Sometimes we hang on to the old ways of doing things because making changes adds more stress to our lives. Change is easier to handle if we plan ahead and get others to help us through the changes. Get the mindset that since change is inevitable, we should try to keep a positive attitude when we move in new directions.

8. Soul Care. A lot of people are driven—driven to succeed, driven to be perfect, driven to impress people, driven to get things done. Relax! Remember that God is in control. Take time to know him better so you can determine his will for your life.

9. Growth. Sometimes we are so busy that we have no time for anything except our hectic activities. We need to take time to read, to stimulate our minds, to take time to reflect on our lives. When we are growing, we are less pushed by demands from other people or from ourselves.

10. Hope. Don't despair about your lifestyle. And keep a bigger perspective in mind. Remember that we have only one life to live. Think of these words of C.S. Lewis: 'If you read history, you will find that Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most about the next.'"

These principles are adapted from a new book by Gary R. Collins, *Breathless: Turning Your Time-Starved Days into a Life Well-lived* (Tyndale House, 1998).