

How Busyness Became a Tool of Oppression

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- [0 : 00] So I tend to think of life in terms of movie clips or tweetable moments.! Somehow I've convinced myself they last longer that way.
- And my wife proved me wrong when she referred to my phone as my black wife. Now, I thought it was funny. I mean, we both giggled, now single men take note.
- Now, I'm no expert, but I don't think she was kidding. She talked about some other stuff I really don't remember. I was too busy in my head composing a tweet where I would quote her with some sort of clever hashtag about marriage and about how much I loved her to be paying attention to her in that moment.
- I think what snapped me back in was the silence that indicated I was supposed to have some sort of response to whatever she was talking about. I told my father that story in hopes to get a little sympathy.
- My father, civil rights and Vietnam war vet, hopelessly charming on his fourth marriage father. And rather than the customary nod, men give each other when they understand.
- [1 : 17] He proceeded to tell me why he failed as my mother's husband. He said it's the same reason half his platoon died in Vietnam and the same reason you are deathly afraid of your daughter becoming a teenager's son.
- You can't hear past the explosions. Either the ones that already happened or the ones you anticipate see the former paralyzes.
- Living life in the rearview mirror, driving full speed across traffic into the center divider. So shell-shocked, you too stupid to duck when bullets are flying. Or the latter.
- Your life a game of capture the flag. So focused on the finish line, you step right on a landmine. So ready to attack the day. Frustrated because you can't find your keys.
- Focused on the meetings you finna miss and the traffic you finna sit in to realize you've been holding your keys the whole time.
- [2 : 17] Slow down. You've been hypnotized by the possibility, son. I couldn't hear past the bombs.
- And the first one didn't kill me and the second one ain't even happened. Yet it ended our family. He told me a love story of a woman born before him.
- He said, but I knew her from before and at the moment of conception, there was an eternal connection. And although I didn't know it, then I'd fight for her affection. It's this war. We've been waging since day one of creation.
- And only when you lose her do you learn to appreciate her. Like even when I'm with her. I'm itching to get rid of her. And she only gives you one shot. Blow it and she's gone.
- That's why I'm telling you this, son. You can't rush her or slow her down. You better keep her on your side. She will slip through your fingers like sand.
- [3 : 18] Her name is time. And she told me a secret. She said multitasking is a myth. You ain't doing anything good, just everything awful.

And she begged me to stop stretching her thin and stuffing her full. And stop being so concerned with the old her and future her. But love her now. Her presence is God's present.

And you should be that present. So I guess I could say I've been through a divorce now. Me and my phone are no longer married.

I think I'm ready to be here now. So that's a poem from a cat named Propaganda. A rapper, a poet, an activist.

So if you're confused and you know me, know I don't have a secret wife and kids. I am quite single. But it's a powerful piece and a solid introduction and foundation as we walk into this message that I've been tasked to preach, which is called the practice of paying attention.

[4 : 30] And sheesh, the practice of paying attention in this news cycle, in this social climate, not to mention the personal, the spiritual, the financial, all these different things. Lord Jesus, there is too much to be paying attention to.

I know I ain't the only one who feel like that. And you want me to preach about this. All right, y'all. So quick life update. I quit my job about a year and some change ago.

I had a plan. I had financial margin. I dropped two projects. I built two websites. I cold emailed 1,500, 1,100,000 different people. And I have been doing the most through all this time.

But in the wake of this AI, anti-DEI, anti-anyone like not right wing and white and male, it's been a little bit of a challenge, right?

And the pressure is building. And as this financial margin that I created shrinks, my stress response is to grind. See, I grew up poor.

[5 : 34] I grew up the fifth of six kids to a single mom. So grace and grind are the only ways that I'm standing in front of y'all today. But amidst these pressures, there's this reality that life don't stop.

And Trump is out here building concentration camps and, you know, the federal funding of kidnapping of immigrant siblings, destroying Medicare and Medicaid. I ain't got enough time to run the list, right?

There's so much stuff happening every single day. All the while, we fund this genocide in Gaza as Israel continues to murder people at distribution sites and Russia continues to try to steal Ukraine and atrocities continue in Congo and Sudan.

Like the overwhelm is real. The notes, the news cycle, the articles, they grow and grow and grow by the minute. Not to mention what just happened in Texas, right? But again, life don't stop.

Faith don't stop. And I've got more questions about my faith right now than I have answers. And nothing is as simple as it was when I was a kid, or at least I thought it was.

[6 : 42] And through all this, I'm supposed to pay attention. As they say in a black church, can I get a witness? See, that's the thing.

Margin is the faith to be when everything is breaking. Attention is the faith to see when everything seems cloudy. And reverence is the faith to hear when everything feels noisy.

So for those of y'all who don't know me, my name is Trevor Wint. I'm on the preaching team here at the Table Church. And I want to say welcome to all y'all. For those who are back with us, for the ones who are new here, we are glad that you're here with us today, this Sunday morning, whether it's physical or digital, welcome for show.

And today, it's my privilege to continue this series that we're calling What Lies Beneath, moving from the clouded to the clear as disciples of Jesus. And today, I want to chat with y'all about this idea of the practice of paying attention.

So if you have your Bibles today, we're going to be in Exodus chapter 3, verses 1 through 8. And if you don't, no worries. It's going to be on the screen. And so as you turn there, I kind of want to set the stage as to what's going on, what we talk about in this section of the Bible.

[8 : 00] And so here there is this really important figure. You might have heard of him. His name's Moses. And he becomes the leader of the Hebrew people and leads them out of slavery in a spot called Egypt.

But before that, Buddy was on the run because he had murked, killed, murdered, assassinated, whatever term you want to use, an Egyptian soldier. And Pharaoh said, I'm going to need that head, Buddy.

And so Pharaoh's out to kill him. So he flees, and then he is in this spot called Midian, and he marries this homegirl. And we find him posted up, just babysitting his father-in-law's sheep.

So this is where we find Moses in verse 1 of chapter 3. Let's get into it. Moses was keeping a flock, or keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian.

He led his flock beyond the wilderness, and he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And there the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush. He looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.

[9 : 03] Then Moses said, I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush has not burned up. When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, Moses, Moses, Moses.

And he said, here I am. Then he said, come no closer. Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. He said further, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters.

Indeed, I know their sufferings. And I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and bring them up out of the land, that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Let's pray. Jesus, our brother, God most high, our parent, Holy Spirit, our helper, I thank you for modeling balance, rest, and margin in this life.

[10 : 14] I ask God that as you're here with us today and this morning, that you would help us to be aware and discern the things that you are saying to us, to give us the courage to rest, the faith to pay attention, and the patience to revere.

May you give us rest in you today. In Jesus' name, amen. So as I mentioned, the focus of this sermon series, or the message in this sermon series, is the practice of paying attention.

But before we can talk about paying attention, right, we got to talk about the vehicle to get to pay attention, which is margin, right? And that's my first point of this sermon, is that margin makes a difference.

So we find Moses on this mountain, and he's tending to his father-in-law's flock. And when he sees this bush on fire, but not burning up, Moses says, I must turn aside.

Now this term, turn aside, is this word called sur. They rolled the R when I listened to the whole, like, vocal thing on Blue Letter Bible.

[11 : 19] So everybody say sur. Look at y'all. Scholars. And the term sur, that phrase, means to turn aside, to depart, to move away from, to come to an end.

And so Moses initially, or literally has to depart from the thing that he's already doing, right, where he has to move away from it. He has to stop and create margin, create space to see this bush.

And this space, he had to create this space to engage his curiosity and his wonder and invite this new experience in his life in this moment. We see that margin makes a difference.

Margin makes this space for him to encounter God. And in our culture, margin not only makes a difference, but margin is countercultural. From Quick Eats to content to ChatGPT to CNN, everything is constantly in a hurry, right?

Everything calls you to hurry. And when everything feels cloudy, when your faith feels cloudy, this can feel suffocating. And yet, what might best breathe life into us in these moments of cloudiness is balance.

[12 : 35] It's boundaries. It's that idea of margin. Margin is the faith to be when everything is breaking. See, Moses might have seemed to be living the good life, right?

Right? He's hanging out with these sheep. He got married. Got a family. He's all good. He's chilling, right? But remember, this dude was essentially a prince of Egypt.

He was the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He's living in this palace. He's privileged. And then he went from privileged to proletariat, working class, right, in a second.

And then we find him 40 years later. This moment is happening 40 years after this. So this is a steep fall, steep decline, if you will. Not to mention, he's a fugitive at this time.

So I imagine there might be a sense of breaking. There might be a sense of chaos. There might be a sense of insecurity and uncertainty at this time. And yet, in this space, at least in this moment, he made time to make a detour.

[13 : 36] He had margin. And that margin led to this moment with God. But margin is the faith to be when everything is breaking. And for many of us, that might feel intimidating or impossible.

But it also might be the salve that our soul needs in this time. My favorite artist is this little-known cat named Kendrick Lamar. Might have heard of him.

And he has this song called Count Me Out, where he raps, You said I'd feel better if I just worked hard without lifting my head up.

That left me fed up. And in this conversation, in this record, he's talking with himself about his inclination towards self-sabotage.

And how his marginlessness, this word was kicking my behind in my daggone prep too. But marginlessness in his life led to him falling apart.

[14 : 38] And like Kendrick, some of us lack margin in our lives from a self-inflicted type perspective, right? Or maybe it's from a means of survival.

But regardless of the reason, regardless of the circumstance, marginlessness will cost us. And it can feel essential, right? Or it can also be an escape.

It can be a barrier that we put up to avoid our feelings, to avoid our doubts, to avoid our questions, our pains, even ourselves, right?

Regardless of the framework, the lack of margin will cost us. But that bar from Kendrick also holds true in other spaces, right?

In this other nuance that's essential for us to engage. And that concept is overwork. Overwork systematizes lack of margin as a means of control.

[15 : 41] And overwork is a tool of the oppressor. Whether ancient or modern, overwork is a tool leveraged by oppressors, by the ruling class, to keep you so busy, so inattentive, so exhausted, that you don't have the mental capacity to consider much of anything outside of your routine, right?

Because if you do, you pose a threat to their power in their pockets. This is so clearly illustrated through what we're experiencing right now in Trump's presidency.

To throw so much at us every single day, so many executive orders, so much BS, to overwhelm our minds, overwhelm our minds, overwork our bodies, so that we have such little capacity to resist.

It's all by design. It's an old play. Because margin makes a difference. Margin is a revolutionary act. We see this with Moses.

It's no coincidence, right? That the one to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt came from outside of their circumstances. Have you ever thought about that?

[16 : 56] Moses had time, right? He had the brain space. He had the margin. All of this to be able to lead this resistance. To lead this exodus.

And the work of the prophet is to create margin in the minds of the oppressed. It's Moses saying to the people of Israel, do you want to be free? It's Harriet Tubman saying to my ancestors, follow me to find freedom.

It's Martin Luther King saying, I may not get there with you, but we as a people will make it to the promised land. That's why one of the most revolutionary things that you can do is to make time to think, to make time to rest, to make time to learn, to create margin.

See, margin isn't equally possible for all of us, but we all have to make our best effort to create space, to create opportunities for margin in our lives, even when it's hard, even when it's under assault, because whether it's because we bought into this concept of a grind, a grind set, if you will, if we've bought into this, this mindset to fill every single empty slot in our calendars, or we're suffering from financial insecurity, or job insecurity, or we're suffering from overwork impressed upon us, whatever it is, whatever it may be, we all need margin in our lives.

We may not all have the same access, the same privilege to choose margin in every aspect of our lives, the emotional, the physical, the mental, the financial, the spiritual, whatever it is, but we all need margin.

[18 : 32] We all must create some sense of margin in our lives, right? Slow down. You've been hypnotized by the possibilities, as propaganda's poem said earlier, right?

And margin creates opportunity to pay attention. And that brings me to my second main point. Slow down. See, we all don't have the same access to margin, but we all have moments where we can slow down and practice presence.

Being present is the practice of living in the moment, being fully aware of where you are now, not concerned with what went on in the moments or hours or days beforehand, or what's to come after this moment, but to be where you are right now, fully.

Moses turns aside, right? To that bush, and he encounters God's self and takes in that moment fully. He was going at such a pace where he invited this detour.

He didn't disregard it. Being present is a question of where are you putting your attention? Is your attention in the past? Is it in the present?

[19 : 47] Or is it in the future? And attention takes time. Author Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book, *An Altar in a World*, or *Altar in the World*, puts it like this. The practice of paying attention is as simple as looking twice at people and things you might just as easily ignore.

To see takes time. Like having a friend takes time. But I get it. In the cloudiness, in the deconstruction, in the darkness, attention can be intimidating, right?

It can be downright scary. But that's why margin is the faith to be when everything is breaking. Attention is the faith to see when everything seems cloudy.

It can be scary. But it's also a part of our maturity and our faiths, our spiritual formation, our development as Christians.

See, because margin and attention are not just about solitude, right? Margin creates space for attention to yourself. Margin also creates space for attention to others.

[20 : 58] And margin creates space for attention to God. When we pay attention to ourselves, we give ourselves space to know ourselves, to love ourselves, to check in with ourselves, to ask questions like, what do I need?

spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically? Where am I at? How am I feeling? This check in with ourselves, right? Are you so caught up in doing?

Are you so overwhelmed that you've overlooked your needs? There's this author named Ruth Haley Barton, right? She wrote this book called Sacred Rhythms.

And in this book, she talks about this moment in her life where she had this spiritual advisor and they had this meeting. She was going at such a breakneck pace and the advisor looks at her and says, your soul is tired and battered.

You can't do anything until you rest and it may take longer than you think. And that self-knowledge is crucial. Just like we discussed earlier this year, right?

[22 : 08] When we were talking about like attention to our emotions, that God is so often speaking to us through our feelings, through our emotions. And if we don't know ourselves well, we put barriers in front of ourselves, in front of discerning where and if God is speaking to us.

Margin also creates space for community. When we pay attention to ourselves, or when we pay attention to others, rather, we can find joy in community, in love, in acceptance, in belonging.

We can show up for one another, asking one another those same questions that we ask of ourselves when we're checking in with ourselves. How you doing? How you feeling? What do you need? Da-da-da. We also create opportunities for God to speak through others.

Like that moment that we just saw earlier in that Ruth Haley Barton book quote, where her mentor is speaking into her, speaking life into her. Now, this don't mean that everything everybody say is from God because we all know people be chirping.

And so, just because someone is saying something that's from God doesn't mean it's from God. John talks about this concept of test of spirits because not everyone is from God. So how do we do this?

[23 : 22] Well, everything has to go through Jesus. If it don't sound like Jesus, if it don't align with the words of Jesus, it ain't Jesus, right? And so, even though people be chirping, it also is the truth still that God speaks through others.

It doesn't mean that God won't speak through others. There's a theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer and he says, let the person who cannot be alone beware of community. Let the person who is not in community beware of being alone.

I'm gonna say it again because it's kind of deep. Let the person who cannot be alone beware of community. And let the person who is not in community beware of being alone.

Know yourself. Know others. Slow down. Stay a while. And margin creates space to pay attention to God. When we pay attention to God, we create opportunities, right, for God to speak into our lives.

When I was a kid, this was communicated to me that like the presence of God was like chills in a worship set, right? Or the voice of God is like the still small voice that I hear and I still don't know what that term means to be perfectly honest with y'all.

[24 : 49] Or it's like someone speaks in tongues and the interpretation of tongues and like that's the word and like that's the way God's speaking. And I'm gonna be honest, I don't know if I buy into any of that stuff anymore.

But if God is speaking and God is speaking when I pay attention to God's self, I imagine it's through moments like reading scripture and the guidance that I feel in those moments.

Or in a book or thoughts pressed upon my heart in prayer or my emotions and processing those things. Like all of this stuff, it's nuanced, it's complicated, but attention is the faith to see when everything seems cloudy.

And in paying attention to God, we also make space to ask of God. There's this kind of potent thing that we see in Jesus a couple of times in the gospels where he's healing someone and he asks of them, what do you want me to do for you?

It's this movement from clouded to clarity as Jesus invites us to be in touch with our desires, right? And to ask him what we need of him.

[26 : 09] So what do you need from God today? What do you need from God in this season? Attention is the faith to see when everything seems cloudy. And that brings me to my final point, reverence and rest.

See, when we're truly present, we create reverence, right? Reverence is the concept of deep respect or honor for someone or something.

It's this grounding practice essential to our spirituality. Barbara Brown Taylor says that reverence reminds us that we are not gods. She also describes reverence like this, for once you are not looking through things or around them toward the next thing which will become see-through in its turn.

For once you are giving yourself entirely to what is right in front of you and what is right in front of you is returning the favor so that reverence is all but unavoidable.

See, reverence can be found in anything. For Moses, his reverence starts with the burning bush in this moment in this story. The next thing he's hearing God tell him that the floor is holy and take his shoes off and then it, you know, expands into Yahweh, God's self.

[27 : 24] See, reverence can be found in the extraordinary, the fantastical. Reverence can be found as much in a burning bush as it can in a Boston Cream Donut.

Y'all really love Boston Cream Donuts. Like, God be speaking to me through some Boston Cream Donuts. I'm not playing. But truly, reverence is this space where we create space to notice, to give ourselves fully in the moment and allow the breath of God to speak out of everything that she spoke into existence and flow into us.

The care, the holiness, the space, the reverence. Margin is the faith to be when everything is breaking. Attention is the faith to see when everything seems cloudy. And reverence is the faith to hear when everything feels noisy.

And this practice of paying attention, right, through these three ideas is essential to our spiritual formation. The margin, the attention, this slowed down spirituality teaches us that abundant life isn't found in boundless busyness.

It's found in balance. It might result in you leading a revolution or resistance, protests, whatever, right? Or it might result in you hearing your kids' first words.

[28 : 53] It might be God speaking to you through a donut. I'd suggest Boston cream. Or feeling the Holy Spirit give you peace that surpasses understanding amidst all of this storm.

For many of us in this room, margin feels absolutely impossible right now. Reverence feels impossible. And paying attention feels absolutely impossible.

And I get it. The world is absolutely crashing all around us. And faith and life and challenge don't stop.

And that's okay. Like, the moment that I mentioned earlier, right, with that book Sacred Rhythms, Ruth Haley Barton, right, where a mentor says to her, a spiritual advisor says to her, your soul is tired and battered.

You can't do anything until you rest and it may take longer than you think. Well, her response to that in the book was, solitude had to be a place of rest for me before it could turn into anything else.

[30 : 02] See, showing up and creating space for God and paying attention looks different for different people in different seasons and that's okay. Start small.

Dr. King reminds us that faith is taking the first step. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step. Margin is the faith to be when everything is breaking.

Attention is the faith to see when everything seems cloudy and reverence is the faith to hear when everything feels noisy. Amen.