

NOTES

The “Notes Section” of the *Christian Education Journal* provides an opportunity for people in the field of Christian education to provide responses to articles in previous issues of the journal and to share more personal reflective articles that provide stimulating ideas for readers to think about. In this issue, Marla Campbell offers reflections and advice on our own need for transformational rest. Enjoy!

TRANSFORMATIONAL REST FOR EDUCATORS



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Abstract: In these hectic days of informational superhighways and busy life schedules, Christian educators desiring to teach for transformation often find little time to rest and to be transformed personally. Implementing biblical models of rest, contemplation, and time alone with God could provide a balanced life that would in turn impart this lesson to our students in an integrated manner. Spiritual transformation must first flow from who we are and how we have been transformed by the Holy Spirit. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans encourages Christians to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Embracing the created design of the rhythms and cycles of life not only changes the way we think, but more importantly how we live and what we teach our students.

Key Words: transformation, spiritual transformation, spiritual disciplines, renewal, Sabbath rest

Theme: Ephesians 3:14–19—Importance of Spiritual Transformation

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide

and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:14–19, New International Version)

Let us assume that the goal of educators revolves around this excerpt from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. As Christian educators, we long to first be "rooted and established in love" and "have power" in order to grasp the height and depth of His love that surpasses knowledge and "be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Secondly, we desire to impart this to our students in an integrated manner, despite the content area of our teaching. Spiritual transformation must flow first from who we are and how we have been transformed by the Holy Spirit. It represents an implicit, even hidden, curriculum as the transformation emerges from lifestyle changes.

In Christian universities, educators often lament the fact that students' lives are not changed by what is taught. Sure they may gain cognitive knowledge, but has character been developed along the way? We have seen an increase in student plagiarism, a decline of behavioral standards, and a disconnect between heart and action. Students of any age respond not merely to what is verbalized, but more poignantly to what is modeled. We educators should model personal spiritual transformation and character development as a primary goal. Instead, we may embrace productivity in the same sense as the world affirms it. Rest appears not to be the strongest spoken or modeled message.

A former colleague frequently received criticism for not "doing" as much as others in the department. He certainly never shirked responsibilities or duties but did not take on an excess of extra tasks. He would explain that he "could only do so much." He clearly put the Lord, his wife and family first, spent time deepening his expertise and understanding in only a few academic areas, while intentionally putting the Sabbath along with regular quiet times with the Lord first. He kept his life's boundaries intact. Others on the faculty resented him. The students by contrast loved him and watched him closely. But what comes to mind is this: If a godly man chooses to prioritize in this manner and not be pressured into overloads, could it be that the wrong questions are being asked of educators? Rather than asking what more can be crammed into a day, a week, or a semester, we should be asking one another about our time in prayer and hearing from—really listening to—God. The ordering of life as God designs it for each of us individually may never win awards on societal standards, but the productivity for His kingdom and the inner peace and transformation within our own lives will be exponential. And, ultimately, it will be what is "caught" even more than "taught" to our watching students.

How are we “transformed by the Holy Spirit?” Romans 12:1–2 tells us that it is by the renewing of our minds. This principle followed throughout Scripture is a “whole person” transformation involving our Trinitarian being. It requires a change that largely takes place in isolation separate from the demands of life and ministry. From the onset of creation, God modeled transformative isolation and rest and gave instruction throughout His Word. In His creative design, He instituted the need for rest. Genesis explains that on the seventh day God rested, blessed the seventh day, and made it holy (Gen 2:2–3). In Exodus 20:8, within the Ten Commandments, He reinforces this with the establishment of Sabbath rest. Emphatically, He explains through the author in subsequent verses how vital Sabbath rest is to holiness:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8)

Arguably this set in motion the rhythms of life, the days of the week, the cycles of season, and so on. Built into each group of measured time is a segment of rest. Often contemporary leaders negate this scriptural design, missing the crucial principle that it is the connecting point between the created and the Creator. Coming apart and separating oneself to God allows for the fullness of His purposes to be manifested in Christian educators for their own soul nurturing and spiritual formation first. Then it transfers to those whom the educator instructs as it flows out of his/her life.

Rest would be an integral part of life for the entire planet from day one and throughout history. The day of rest, Sabbath, governs most calendars of the world by marking the end of labor, rest (at least in theory), and the start of a new week just as God ceased labor and rested. But few contemporary people actually stop and rest, much less focus on time alone with the Lord, time for worship, time for contemplation in a manner of “unplugging” and resting. The fact within God’s design and creation seems to beg the question of contemporary man: “Why is it so hard to stop and rest?” Why is it so difficult to “stop the madness” and come away? Even daily devotional time seems a catch phrase among Christians but rarely a reality.

The pace of life in western society speeds up even more with all of the technological devices. When talking about disconnecting from the daily grind, we now literally mean disconnecting. It is increasingly more difficult to

hear God, or even one's own thoughts, when plugged into computers, iPods, cell phones, internet, MP3 players, Play Stations, TVs, and on and on. Archibald D. Hart punctuates this throughout his book *Thrilled to Death* (2007). In chapters 4 and 10 he presents a strong case for extensive stress and anxiety being produced through unbalanced use of technology such as the ones listed above. He gives suggestions for "controlling your adrenaline" (pp.165–178) and goes on in chapter 13 to express the urgent need for mastering relaxing and meditation. Just as Paul wrote in Philippians 4, Hart reminds the reader to "think on these things," which are the things of God not the distractions from Him.

A return to the beginning might help gain perspective on this current challenge. The expressed modeling came "in the beginning" when God rested. He does not herein nor anywhere in Scripture condone slothfulness, laziness, and the like. Rather He sets up a plan for productivity. He encourages work, even emphasizing the fruits of one's labor. But He calls for rest because His design in creation requires a time of renewal, replenishing, and restoration.

Even in the case of the fields, which serves as a prime example to humans, the land is only to be worked for six years, and on the seventh it is to lay fallow. In this manner the field can be replenished, restored, and renewed (Lev 25:3–7). The following year the ground will be exponentially richer for the new crop than if it had been depleted one more time by one more crop draining the nutrients from it.

This truth presents a strong metaphor for educators. The imperative lies in the concept of resting, taking time off, and sitting at the feet of Jesus for renewal. Embracing this in one's life results in the same productivity as the fields. "Nutrients" can be restored to enable one to continue to produce exponentially, rather than pressing on to exhaustion. We cannot give from a dry well, dry land, or a dry and empty self.

All of my adult life I have been in education, ministry, and missions, sometimes all at once. I was a high-energy firstborn child who transferred all that comes with that extroverted personality type into adulthood. At the end of each semester it seemed I would crash and often become ill due to the fact that I packed my life so full. Philippians 4:13 became rather twisted in my interpretation as I did "all things" but not necessarily through Christ strengthening me. Rather I would ask Him to bless all the things I took on, giving me strength after I had committed to them. My heart's desire was always to serve and follow the Lord, but I often did not wait on Him for direction in how to appropriate that. Both on the mission field and in the high school classroom, exhaustion became my frequent companion.

Then, after seven years of teaching at the university, I was given the gift of a semester sabbatical. Realizing that this is a rare gift that few receive, I knew

God had a purpose for me in it. He had prepared my heart in many ways for several years in advance. I began studying the ancients and those who engaged regularly in retreat, solitude, silence, and contemplation. Nothing could be further from my basic instincts. But the time came, and I went to Spain to help in establishing a spiritual retreat center. Besides retreating alone there with the Lord and in some retreats with small groups, I traveled in the British Isles to experience historical “retreat” and current engagement of the same. God changed my life by reordering it to His original design. The years prior had contained for me a quest to hear God more consistently and more intentionally. I felt challenged and inspired by the first centuries of Christianity. I wondered if their experiences would be possible today. Can we hear God in a busy world of multitasking? Can we discern His will amid our many activities?

God has shown me practical ways to embrace the new paradigm and not lose what He accomplished in my life while on sabbatical. I truly encourage missionaries and educators to “come apart” and begin to turn the freneticism around in each individual life for our own sakes and for the sakes of those to whom we minister. Each day I am committed to meet with the Lord first thing in the morning. Each week I continue the practice with which I was raised. I attend a worship service on the Sabbath and do no work that day in an effort to “keep it holy.” Each month my goal is to have a one-day silent retreat with Him. Each year I plan to have several days away to hear from God. This will look different for each person depending on his or her own life and location. But God has a design for each of us to keep us connected with Him and for multiplied productivity as He deems it important. I believe educators can teach and explain this to students, but when students observe these intentional plans in an educator’s life, it speaks volumes. They then begin to comprehend the transformation they see and long for it themselves.

Various colleagues and I have found it quite effective to take time with the Lord as we enter our classrooms. Prior to the arrival of students, we pray over the classrooms, desks, and individuals, and the students begin the day with educators attuned to God’s direction. I do so after I have had my own quiet time reading the Word, praying, and listening for myself. And I pray that “the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart” (Ps. 19:14) will be acceptable in His sight and that they will be used in the transforming of students.

Recently I found myself engaged in a very meaningful dialogue with a student who had conducted his own experiment with the Lord. For four days of regular life on campus, he did not speak. He hoped to hear God better by minimizing distractions and quieting himself. When asked his findings, he expressed a new awareness of God’s constant presence, a deepening desire and ability to hear His voice. He also had a profound realization of the cacophony and interferences that surround us all daily. We discussed how con-

ditioned we are to living in what might be termed melee. He chose not to speak on the phone and reduced texting, e-mails, and the like. I saw in this young man Psalm 42: "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you."

"Be still and know that I am God." Richard Rohr, in *Everything Belongs* (2003, p. 82), prints Psalm 46:10 in this manner:

Be still and know that I am God
 Be still and know that I am
 Be still and know
 Be still
 Be.

A friend expressed frustration due to the busyness of life. She pronounced that we need to find a way to "fit in" time with God. That grabbed my heart. I thought of the graphic example of putting sand and stones in a jar. If the priority items go in first (represented by the stones), other things (which sand represents) will sift in easily. But if the sand goes in first (symbolic of life's lesser concerns), the stones will never fit. I suggested, "Perhaps it's like tithing. We give the 'first fruits' of our finances to the Lord before paying the bills, then there is enough money to meet necessities. If we give Him our time first, He helps arrange the rest of life."

It is heartening to see that over the past decade or so many evangelical writers have joined the writers of antiquity on this topic. Mark Buchanan's *The Rest of God* (2006) or Klaus Issler's *Wasting Time with God* (2001) kind of say it all in the title! The depth of finding the *Thin Places* where God seems closest, as Tracy Balzear (2007) describes it, truly stems from the created design to connect with the Creator. These and many other authors help give suggestions for transformational connectiveness and spiritual rest in this harried world. Other authors such as Ruben Job (1983, 1994) have written guides to give direction to spiritual retreat and quiet time, since contemporary Christians often experience difficulties just quieting their minds in order to engage on a soul nurturing level. Understandably, the concept of stopping when life moves so quickly presents a daunting challenge.

To punctuate this point, a biblical example found in I Kings 17 provides an intriguing scenario. Briefly stated in five short verses, Elijah seemed to "retreat" to the brook Kerith. Apparently he did not know how, why, or for how long, but he would do so in obedience to God's direction. Of course, God knew why, for how long, and what the outcome would be.

Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah: 'Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.' So he did what

the Lord had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. (I Kings 17:2–6)

That is all that is known. Elijah retreated in obedience to the Lord. How long is unknown. “Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him” (I Kings 17:7–8). At this seemingly random juncture, supplies stopped coming to Elijah and he was instructed by God to go to visit a widow who, with her son, was near the point of starvation. What happened there was a miracle. God multiplied the meager provisions. There was plenty for Elijah, the widow, and her family from that day on. Surprisingly for them all, the boy died. But again miraculously, God used Elijah brought him back to life (I Kings 17:10–24).

What if Elijah had not walked in obedience to the Lord? What if he had not retreated? It is easy to project his possible dialogue with God especially if projecting as a 21st century person. “God, there’s a drought and people are starving! I can’t just go sit by the brook and let the brook and raven feed me! What will the others think? They won’t respect me as a godly man much less a prophet. They won’t believe in you either if we just let them sit and die.”

God’s omniscience had it all under control. Elijah was revived at the brook. God filled him not only with physical nourishment, but with His presence, His voice, His nurturing, then His direction. It might be supposed that because of this infilling, Elijah was equipped to produce not one, but two miracles, including the young boy’s resurrection. Doubtless Elijah would have unsuccessfully moved in the flesh had he not heeded the instruction of the Lord for retreat.

Likewise, in the New Testament there are many examples of times in which Jesus observably separated from the crowds to be alone with the Father. He was a superb model, even at the darkest hour of history in Gethsemane (Luke 22:39–46). For 40 days (Luke 4), only Jesus and the Father were in the wilderness while Satan tested and tempted Him. He went through this dismal time knowing that the voice of God would carry Him.

At one point in His ministry, Mary and Martha desperately beckoned Jesus to come as their brother was dying (John 11). They believed He could heal Lazarus. Clearly, Jesus never moved in the tyranny of the urgent. He continued where He was, seemingly awaiting the Father’s direction and voice. When Jesus finally came, Lazarus had died. But, because of His obedience not to be moved by panic, the miracle was greater. God knew the timing. He not only healed a man but raised him from the dead. By doing so He gave a foreshadowing of His own death and resurrection to come. The lesson Jesus modeled was certainly transformational even in His day.

Scripture is replete with examples of patriarchs and leaders heeding God's design for rest. Clearly there is in nature a need to pull away from the daily grind and be restored in order for the mundane to be enhanced. Christian educators find their ministry deepened when they take time regularly for uninterrupted intimacy with God. Often overlooked is the reality that God put a rhythm into life. There are times in a day. The sun rises and sets. The tides ebb and flow. The calendar year moves through seasons. There are seasons to a person's life.

Sadly, contemporary Christian leaders not only frequently omit the teaching of this critical truth, but they do not embrace it in their own lives either. Programs and productivity supplant the cyclical concept that includes rest along with labor. Quantifiable results overshadow quality of life. Millions of dollars are spent to restore fallen pastors and reverse missionary attrition statistics. But little attention is paid to preventative medicine and soul care. Repeatedly, missionaries, pastors, educators, and the like bemoan, "I would if I only had the time." It is like tithing; no one can afford not to tithe. No one can afford to be too busy not to stop and rest.

A missionary couple ministering in a very difficult place in the world believed that God had sent them there. Their work proved very effective in a place where the gospel had rarely, if ever, been preached. Many came to know the Lord. A church and school were begun. The couple continued on. They never stopped. There were too many who needed them, too much to do, and too many who still had not heard. After several years, exhausted, a crisis of epic proportions hits. They kept going in an effort to help, although the crisis truly exceeded anything they could feasibly do. There was nothing left of them emotionally, spiritually, and physically. But the need was still there. What should they do? As is the case with many in similar leadership situations, they began to move out of obligation and resentment, no longer out of a passion and vision for God's calling. Eventually they lost sight of the goal, lost effectiveness, and longed to leave the mission field. Perhaps if they had stopped to rest, be replenished, and return, the story would be different. Sadly, this scenario can be written over and over again using differing names as the rate of missionary attrition, ministerial burnout and failure, and the switching of careers among educators multiplies. We in Christian education should be about "preventative medicine" rather than "crisis management."

Besides the devastation in the lives of leaders, we pass on this modeling informally to our students. Our lives speak louder than our words. Parents abet their own children in securing this lifestyle by trying to squeeze every sport and activity into each season of their lives. Pastors put more and more programs into the life of the church, hoping to reach the community, but often burn out the congregants instead. Educators encourage students to take

more classes and get involved with more activities, while they are also working a job or two to pay tuition.

I have frequently watched high school and college students reach a pinnacle of emotional crisis due to over involvement. They ask, "How can I know God's will for my life," when they rarely talk to Him or even stop to rest. I have said to many in my office, that at the current pace, I hope they make it to age 30! We as leaders must help the next generations order their lives according to God's design—but we must reorder our own first. This would and can be truly transformational. Dallas Willard, in his book *Divine Conspiracy* (1998), spends an entire chapter (9) pointing out that we, the Christian educators, must exhibit a "Christ-like curriculum," which he proposes comes from the core of our being intentionally connected to and developed by the Lord.

A positive example can be found in the young mother, the daughter of a friend, who is also a homeschool teacher. When with her children, she takes time out each day to rest on the sofa and spend time with the Lord. During this time, her children must also be quiet in their own rooms or corners of the family room. They may read or nap and are given suggested things to do according to their age to build into their lives a pattern of "rest" and meeting with Jesus. This can be done anywhere in the world. When children watch parents value alone time with God, they are secure in the knowledge that their parents pray for them, reverence the Lord, and place Him in highest priority. They also see the pattern of seeking Him first as their lives are transformed.

By contrast, desperation may drive us to a change. Jill Briscoe recounts, often when she speaks, how that as a young mom herself she was often alone with the children. Her husband, Stuart, traveled with his ministry for extensive periods of time. She could not find time to be alone with the Lord due to the demands of her children during Stuart's times away. In frustration one day she took all of the items from the playpen and hopped into it herself. There she spent half an hour with the Lord to the amazement of her confused children. This continued day after day until her children also realized that this was their time to be quiet and allow their mother some devotional time as noted in the previous illustration of the mother who homeschooled her children.

This example of modeling provides a pattern similar to the biblical references for the life of the educator that later transfers to the student. I realize that I cannot verbally "teach" this to my students. My life must model what God has transformationally done in me. Likewise, even when I explain the design of creation for all of our lives, my students must still come to an acceptance for their own lives and foster a desire to allow the Lord to transform them. Yes, we must all be transformed in this way because it is extremely countercultural almost anywhere in the world. It is not the innate propensity of humans, but it truly is the yearning of our souls because it comes from God's fundamental design in each of us. Consequently, conforming to this

design moves us into a Christ-like culture and produces soul and life transformation. This is the starting point for all other transformation.

Henri Nouwen in his book *The Living Reminder* (1977) poses this scenario of a pastor who regularly schedules time with God:

We ministers may have become so available that there is too much presence and too little absence, too much staying with people and too little leaving them, too much of us and too little of God and His spirit. It is clear that much of this is connected with a certain illusion of indispensability. This illusion needs to be unmasked.

From all I have said about the minister as a sustaining reminder, it becomes clear that certain unavailability is essential for the spiritual life of the minister. I would like to make a plea for prayer as the creative way of being unavailable.

How would it sound when the question, “Can I speak to the minister?” is not answered by “I am sorry he has someone in his office,” but “I am sorry, he is praying.” When someone says, “The minister is unavailable because this is his desert day;” could that not be a consoling ministry? What it says is that the minister is unavailable to me, not because he is more available to others, but because he is with God, and God alone—the God who is our God.

When our absence from people means a special presence to God, then that absence becomes a sustaining absence. Jesus continuously left his apostles to enter into prayer with the Father. It is obvious that Jesus does not maintain his relationship with the Father as a means of fulfilling his ministry. On the contrary, his relationship with the Father is the core of his ministry. Therefore, prayer, days alone with God, or moments of silence, should never be seen or understood as health devices to keep in shape, to charge our “spiritual batteries,” or to build up energy for ministry. No, they are all ministry. We minister to our parishioners, patients, and students even when we are with God and God alone.

It is in the intimacy with God that we develop a greater intimacy with people and it is in the silence and solitude of prayer that we indeed can touch the heart of the human suffering to which we want to minister. (pp. 48–51)

God desires for all to be so frequent in meeting with Him that His “still, small voice” is recognizable throughout the daily routine. Probably the most classic example of this lies in the life and small book of Brother Lawrence. A 17th-century French monk, Brother Lawrence desired to be alone with God, but also be in and aware of His presence in all things. He records his process in *Practicing the Presence of God* (1976), which continues to be a poignant guide today. The venerable monk speaks of intimacy with Jesus birthed in

prayer and alone times, but then expresses the continual presence through his daily and mundane routine. Chores become additional communion with God.

I made this my business as much all the day long as at the appointed minute, even in the height of my business, I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thought of God . . . and though I have done it very imperfectly, yet I have found great advantages by it. . . . They become habitual and the presence of God rendered as it were natural to us. (p. 32)

In today's urbanizing world, time appears to be of the essence. We can say that this advice came from an era far removed from our own. Yet the principle remains. So too the answer remains. Begin with "remembering the Sabbath" weekly and keeping it holy. Then schedule minutes in the morning for alone time with God anywhere in your home. Take Him in intentional ways with you on the commute and into the classroom. Once this becomes part of the daily routine, or rhythm of daily life, it will probably increase and there will be a longing for it.

The Christian educator focused on making a difference must embrace God's design in order to personally be transformed and thereby be able to teach for transformation. James 3:1 says, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." It is necessary for the educator to model his/her own transformation and intentional time with God to students prior to embarking on integrated lessons intended to do the same.

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