

Enjoy the Journey

Dear Ben,

This summer I discovered something about myself. I learned it driving across Wisconsin, of all places. I suppose I've driven through Wisconsin 25 times. My wife and I live in Minneapolis and both our families live in Ohio, and you have to go through Wisconsin to get to Ohio. In addition, our daughter lives in Chicago, requiring another two trips through Wisconsin per visit.

For years, Wisconsin was an obstacle between our destinations and us. I was always in a hurry to get to the other side of Wisconsin. It seemed so long and (dare I say it?) boring. But right smack in the middle of my last trip something strange happened. For the very first time, I noticed that Wisconsin is a very pretty place. I was so amazed I slowed down to get a better look. I saw rolling hills and picturesque farms that I had missed for years. In my hurry to get to the other side of Wisconsin, my vision narrowed to the width of a concrete highway, and I just plain missed 300 miles of God's good creation.

I was so impressed with the new discovery that early the next Saturday morning a friend and I rode our motorcycles to Chippewa Falls where another friend lives. The three of us spent the rest of the day meandering down back roads through the lake country of western Wisconsin. I had no idea all those rivers, lakes, woods and small towns were there. And all of it so pretty. Why didn't I ever slow down long enough to see it before?

I guess most of my adult life has been dominated by destinations. I'm always going somewhere, completing some goal, fashioning some future, doing some task. Because I'm so preoccupied with destinations, I don't even know what I've missed along the way. But very likely I've missed lots of wonderful days and delightful experiences. Head down, vision narrowed to the path before me, God only knows what I've sped by on the way somewhere.

In a similar way, pastoral life is full of destinations, tasks and other narrow highways through life, and I've learned to move fast through all of it. I seldom sit down in a hospital room or a living room and listen. I have a list in my pocket: more people, another hospital, another place to go or something else to do.

My mind never stops moving. It is filled with information and continually sorting it out, sifting through it and moving on to the next thought. How rare to sit in silence before God, to be still and know anything but tumbling thoughts working toward a sermon, a meeting, a strategy, a writing assignment. And how very bad for my soul!

And bad for ministry, too. Do the people sense I'm always in a hurry? How can they miss it? I've learned how to move swiftly and, I trust, graciously from person to person in public settings. Yet the times I do slow down enough to really listen I invariably receive a blessing.

I've traveled down the pastoral road quite a few miles in 28 years of ministry. Like the saying goes, *I've been there, done that*. But since that trip through Wisconsin, I've worked hard at slowing down enough to see what's

beside the highway of my life. Honestly, I'm still not very good at it. And I can't sit still very long. But I'm learning to enjoy more of the vistas in each day's journey.

Now, for example, I stopped scheduling breakfast meetings. Each morning I get up early and make coffee for my wife and me. We spend the first hour of each day together with no agenda except being together. Our relationship is foundational and infinitely more important than any breakfast meeting I've ever attended.

I've also re-established a habit from my early ministry. I arrive at the office before anyone else, shut the door and spend two hours in quiet reading and reflection. Only an emergency alters this discipline. I read from my Greek New Testament followed by systematic reading through books of devotion, theology, biography and pastoral helps. I don't take phone calls and the staff knows not to interrupt. It's a matter of feeding my soul, making space for God and creating a *pace* for that day and all of life. Then when I hit the road about 10 A.M., my heart is full and I'm ready for ministry. No matter what happens the rest of the day, I've had a good day already.

After years of thinking about it, I decided to work at home one day a week. Friday works for me. It is a day for reading, writing and thinking. Sometimes I finish my sermon, though ordinarily that task is finished Thursday evening. I don't answer the phone, and my staff respects my day alone. When the weather permits, I ride my motorcycle through the countryside in the afternoon and into the evening. Friday at home is the most refreshing and pacing experience I've known. I'm a better man, husband, father and pastor because of it.

When my life ends, I hope my family and my church say of me, he loved us. Honestly, people won't really see how many balls we juggled or how fast we could move about. They'll only know how we loved them. And this requires that we slow down and take the time to love God, love life and love them.

Your Fellow Traveler,

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'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.'

Luke 10:41-42