

Don't Leave Home Without It
Embracing SLOW
Jeff Jones

Hello everybody and welcome to Chase Oaks and to this series. I've not spoken for the last three weeks, so you might wonder who I am. I'm Jeff, the lead pastor around here, and I've just gotten back from the study break I do every year, which is the time I plan the year ahead. It gives me way more time to plan and to pray, and many of you pray for me during this time of year—which I really appreciate, because it is the most important time of the year. And while I was gone, did I spoil you or what with the speakers we have enjoyed? Ryan Leak, Bob Goff, and John Townsend. All I can say is, Wow. So thankful for those guys.

Bob and John kicked off this series we are in called *Don't Leave Home Without It*, about embracing a new, better normal, as we try to figure out how to do life again in this pandemic and after this pandemic. It's a challenging time but could very well be the most impactfully good experience we ever go through as a culture, if we are willing to learn the lessons such times provide. That's what this series is about. As we eventually move toward something more normal, what is that new normal that we want to adopt? What have we learned that we don't want to leave home without?

Bob challenged us to live lives of focus and clarity around the things that matter most, and John talked about deeper connection. If you missed those, go back and watch them. Today we are talking about something that is very hard for me, and probably for most of you too, but absolutely vital to a Jesus say of life. Today we are talking about Embracing SLOW. At the beginning of this pandemic season, in March, we as a culture shut down most normal activity. We thought then it would be a two-week stay at home thing and then we'd be done. We'd beat the disease, or at least get it under control. It happened really fast, but once those weeks of quarantine at home came, thing slowed down immediately for most of us. All the activities we were driving our kids to, shut down. All church activities, shut down. Most of our offices, shut down. Bars and restaurants and movie theaters and malls, shut down. Getting nails done, hair done, tattoos done, shut down. Even ski resorts, shut down. We went from driving through life at 100 mph, to a dead stop. We had an opportunity we may never have again, to experience a completely different pace of life. We had the opportunity to embrace SLOW. Most people I talked to found it to be profoundly good. Families ate dinner together at the dinner table, many for

the first time. Couples had time to actually talk with each other. Christy and I rode bikes together and took walks together every day. It made me realize how separate our lives actually were, because I am busy doing my work thing, she her work thing, and we had separate hobbies. So, we were mostly missing each other. And then those few weeks came. They were a gift. They brought us back together when I didn't even realize we were so far apart. Many told me they had more time to read the Bible and pray than ever. Our church attendance online tripled for those weeks, people had time for church. It was a special time.

And then it was over, at least for me. As we realized that this wasn't going to be a 2 to 4 week break, but a longer term process, for many of us life became even more intense than it was before the pandemic. We had to transition our businesses, jobs, organizations to this new reality, and I know for me at least the last months have been some of the most intense months of my life. Then came the death of George Floyd, following Ahmad Arbery and Brianna Taylor, which became and continues to be an intense time of learning and leading. My only brother also was diagnosed with brain cancer, and soon went into a coma, while all that was going on. So, I was shooting back and forth to Alabama. That was what led up to study break. Some years I jump into study break with energy, other years I crawl into study break depleted, but this year, I couldn't even crawl. I just sort of rolled into it. It's why I didn't do what I've always done, and that is ask for prayer requests to take with me. I usually take many 1000's of prayer requests with me, the last few years sharing them with the elders. But I couldn't do it. I didn't have the gas that takes. I'll make it up to you. We'll find a time to do that soon, but I just couldn't.

In God's providence, right before study break, I called John Townsend to get him ready to speak and after a while he said, "How are you doing with all that is going on?" I told him a long list of things we as a church had been doing and planned to do, and he responded, "You didn't answer my question. You told me what you are doing, which is cool, but I asked you, "How are doing? A lot of lead pastors aren't doing very well, really depleted right now, so I'm just wondering how you are doing?" So, I told him that I was more depleted than maybe ever, but I was going on a study break, so it would be all good. He said, "Tell me about that. What does that mean, "study break?" I told him what I do during that time, and he said, "Why do you call that a break? That's a strange word for what you do. You basically take some weeks, where you pack in as much intense study time as you can to prepare sermon series, to read and think and plan for the future of the church, often twelve to fourteen hours a day, and you call that a break?" I said, "Well, a break from the normal." He said, "I would call that a study intensive, because that's what it is. How are you going to get a real break?" I hadn't even thought about it, but I'm so

glad that I talked with him, because I did take time to think about how I live my life—how sustainable is it really. I have a lot of friends in ministry who are checking out or burning out or flaming out. I don't want to be that guy.

So, out of all this, I am trying to follow Jesus in a new way, and that means embracing slow. I value the idea, but I've never embraced slow. I think that's true of most of us. As Americans, slow for us is a bad word. When people talk about slow movies, a slow person, a slow line, we don't hear those as good things. For us, fast is good, slow is bad. But what we don't realize is how much we lose when we go through life fast. Years ago, there was this campaign to help make highways safer with signs all over highways that said, "Speed kills." You may remember that. What is true on highways is also true in life. Speed kills. Speed kills our soul, our peace, our joy, the depth of relationships, depth of character. Nothing lasting or deep is built fast. Can you know the soul of a child at 100 mph?

The frenetic pace of American life is an anomaly. We think life has always been like this, but it hasn't. You know before the invention of the light bulb in 1879 people averaged 11 hours of sleep each night? Now the average is 7. Dumb light bulbs. But we can also blame screens. When asked about competition from Amazon Prime and other streaming services, the CEO of Netflix shrugged his shoulders and said that their biggest competition was sleep. That's what they're after. Make people stop wasting so much time sleeping, so they can look at more streaming things on screens.

HBR did a study that found the average American worker now works four weeks longer per year than we did in 1979. It's only getting faster. Even today, most cultures around the world don't live nearly as fast and busy as we do. We had this writing partnership with us, a partner in New Zealand, and another partner based in Austria, two very developed, productive countries. When we were planning our meeting schedule for the year, the Austrians said, "Well, of course we can have no meetings in August." I was like, "August—the whole month?" "Absolutely. Nobody works in August." And then the Kiwis chimed in. Same with us but in January. And I'm like, the whole month of January? Any other times I should know about? And there were. So un-American. We think we are winning, but what if we are actually losing? During those weeks of quarantine, we got to experience what we lose when we speed through life. So, today, I want us to make sure we don't miss the lesson. I want us to learn to embrace slow.

This is important for all of us, but way important for those of us who are Jesus followers, because you and I cannot follow Jesus and go faster than he does.

Doesn't that makes sense? You can't go faster than what you follow. A pastor and really great writer John Ortberg writes about a conversation with Dallas Willard, who was an amazing thinker and writer. If you have never read a Dallas Willard book, give it a shot. They aren't easy because every sentence is deep and meaningful. They are not fast reads. So, Dallas was asked by a friend of John, "If you could have only one word to describe Jesus, what would it be?" That's a big question, and there is nobody I'm aware of that has the depth that Dallas had to answer it. Of all the words he could have chosen, you know what he chose? Relaxed.

Dallas acknowledged that Jesus had the most important mission of anyone in history and had the most impact on this planet that any other single human in history, but the one word he chose to describe him was "relaxed." And the more you think about it, you can see why.

Jesus was never in a hurry. He walked through life, not sped through life. He lived at the speed of foot, not going 100 mph but more like 3. He had time for people and never seemed to be in a big rush. He could have bought a high-speed chariot with a team of horses, but he didn't. For his disciples, he chose slow learners, not fast hot shots. In Luke, he tells them, "how foolish you are and slow to believe." He could have chosen anyone, but he chose people he knew would be slow but open. He even waited thirty years to start his ministry, and the first thing he did when he started was taking forty days to be alone with God out in the wilderness. He started the mission by taking a break to be with God the Father. He didn't preach his first sermon until age thirty, and his first miracle, at thirty years old, he considered it too soon but did it anyway because his mom begged him to do so to save a wedding for a friend. During his ministry, he always had time for people, hung out with people, said yes to every spontaneous party invitation.

Compared to most of us, even though Jesus accomplished more than anyone, he was indeed relaxed. He embraced slow, and if you are like me, that may be one of the hardest things to embrace about the Jesus way of life. I don't do slow well. I've talked about that a lot over the years with driving because I've gotten a lot of tickets over the years. I actually thought I was doing a lot better, and a few months ago got a ticket, and the policeman said, "You know, if you get another ticket, your license is going to be suspended." I was like, "That's a thing?" So, I'm trying to drive slower, but going through life that way?

Most of us know that life would be better if we did, so let's learn from Jesus how to embrace slow. How to accomplish way more by going slower. What if the

fastest way to get the most done, to become the people we want to become, to have the deep connections with the people we love, is to go slow?

SLIDE _____)

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Let's learn from the one many of us have chosen to follow. Embracing slow means living at a slower, more relaxed pace, with more margin and yet great intentionality at the same time. If we are going to follow Jesus, we have to learn to walk with him at his pace through life. He came and lived here, so we know from the biblical accounts of his life a good bit about what embracing slow looks like. So, let's break it down.

Embracing slow means EMBRACING INTERRUPTIONS.

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Embrace Interruptions.

Most of my life tends to be very planned, and I generally don't like interruptions. My guess is many of you are the same way. But Jesus didn't live that way. He lived with enough margin in his life, that he saw interruptions as opportunities. In fact, all the great stories we have about Jesus were not planned in his outlook account. The healings, the incredible interactions, and so on, were unplanned interruptions.

One of those multiple interruption days began with a very dramatic healing of the Gerasene demoniac, and the interruptions kept coming:

SLIDE _____) Mark 5:21-23

“When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, ‘My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.’”

So, this is in the middle of the sermon, and Jairus is so desperate with a dying daughter that he interrupts Jesus mid-talk. I'm trying to think what I would do—probably say, “Dude, I'm still preaching. Why don't you make an appointment with my assistant, and we'll see what we can do?” But here's what Jesus does:

SLIDE _____) Mark 5:24
“So Jesus went with him.”

He just leaves with him. Says, “Sermon's over. Catch ya later.”

So, Jairus' heart is pumping, hoping that Jesus gets there on time. But on the way to the house, a lady who had been sick for years passes by Jesus, and there is this whole interaction where he heals her and converses with her. Jairus' blood pressure is boiling; he's like, “Lady, I feel for you, but my daughter is dying.” And sure enough, while he is talking to this lady, we read:

SLIDE _____) Mark 5:35
“While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. ‘Your daughter is dead,’ they said. ‘Why bother the teacher anymore?’”

How dejected he must have been, but Jesus doesn't leave him in that state long:

SLIDE _____) Mark 5:36
“Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, ‘Don't be afraid; just believe.’”

He basically says, “Relax. Just believe.” He finishes the conversation, goes to Jairus' house and raises his daughter from the dead and she is fine. His whole day was one big string of interruptions, which is really the story of his ministry.

It makes me wonder how much I miss, having my days so planned, so packed, that I have no margin for interruption. And when I am interrupted, I tend to see them as impositions. Jesus saw them as opportunities. Embracing slow doesn't mean that we never plan. We obviously have to do that. But it does mean that we leave

margin for unplanned interruptions--that we have enough margin in our lives to look for opportunities to serve, to encourage, to bring healing and help to people around us. If Jesus lived as planned as I usually do, we wouldn't have most of the amazing Jesus stories we have.

SLIDE _____)
Embrace R&R

Embracing slow also means that we embrace R&R. Jesus' life was full of mission. He wasn't a slacker, but he didn't just work hard. He played hard too. He rested. He recreated. We have stories about Jesus taking naps, which is kind of strange. I'm embarrassed if I take a nap. I don't want people to know I need them. Jesus had no problem with that. The Son of God was a Savior, but he was also a napper. People are giving me granddad name suggestion since last time I spoke I shared I am going to be a granddad and I asked for suggestions. Several have suggested Napaw, and one family said the granddad earned it by being such a prolific napper. If Jesus was a granddad, he could be that guy. We also see Jesus getting creative to get away to spend unhurried time with his Father to renew, to get away with the disciples and other refreshing people, or just to be out in the wilderness alone.

Jesus also honored this thing called sabbath. At the very beginning of creation, God set in motion this cycle of work and rest, work and sabbath. Sabbath is a day in the week set apart for restoration. Sabbath became part of the OT law, and when Jesus came, he didn't blow it off like a lot of people think. He didn't kill the sabbath idea but sought to rescue it from the religious leaders who made it this legalistic juggernaut. As he said to them, one time when he was breaking their rigid Sabbath rules,

SLIDE _____) Mark 2:27
"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

Jesus participated in the Sabbath, as well as all the special feast days God instituted, which were also designed to days of restoration. When you add all those up, it's about 25% of their days were R & R days. That was God's calendar for his people in the Old Testament, and Jesus who is God, honored that. But let's take all the special celebrations out of it, and just focus on the principle of the Sabbath.

I have yet to figure out how to do that. I do normally take Saturdays off. That's my off day. But it's usually a Sabbath day, because it or at least part of it, is for doing all the crud you have to do in life that is not work. Stuff around the house, etc. The idea of Sabbath is to do only that which is restorative for one day a week. One time a wealthy business guy I know was kind enough to send me to this very high-priced effectiveness program for CEO's. They had spent millions of dollars researching how CEO's could be more effective and creative, and you know what their top finding was? That if a CEO took what they called a Free Day, a 24-hour period of time where they only did what was restorative, their creativity and effectiveness the other days of the weeks spiked up. I wanted to raise my hand and say, "You could have just read the Bible. This was actually God's idea." But I didn't.

God tells us to do it, and Jesus modeled it, but most of us blow it off. Jesus let us know we don't have to be slavish to it. The idea is for it to be good for us, not a pain in the rear. However, this is how we are designed to flourish, and we need to make a priority of R&R like Jesus did.

SLIDE _____)
Embrace Relationships.

I'll be brief here because we talk a lot about this, but the reason we talk a lot about it is that it is so biblical and so important. You and I are created for deep connections with other people. Jesus modeled that, but when you look at how he developed his close relationships, the #1 learning you will gain is that he made them a priority. As busy as he was, he made time for his closest relationships...and guess what kind of time? Slow. Unhurried time. That's the only way relationships go deep, is unhurried time. You cannot speed your way to a deep relationship with someone. I know that, because I've tried. It doesn't work.

When I was a young parent, I had several big aha moments that made me prioritize unhurried time with our kids more. It took more than one because I'm like Jesus' twelve disciples that I mentioned were slow to learn. One time I was reading to my kids when they were very young, and it had been a long day and they seemed really sleepy. They picked one of the longer books we used at night because they wanted more time. I had things to do, so I started skipping pages after a while and rushing through it. Collin caught me, and said, "It's okay dad. You don't have to read to us any more tonight. We can go to sleep without it." And wow was that a wake-up call. It was like God saying to me, "You big dummy! One day you are going to wish you could be reading to your kids again, and you are blowing it."

That conversation helped changed the way I parented because you can't speed your way through parenting and expect to have a close connection to the heart of a child or a teenager. It takes lots of unhurried time. That's true in every relationship.

So, we have an opportunity to do life differently. Earlier this year, most of us (not all, I realize), had an imposed slow down. Now things are progressively speeding up, at least we think they are. Regardless how the pandemic plays out, things will speed up to full speed if we allow it to do so. And is that what we want? Do we want to say yes to everything we used to say yes to? Do we want our kids to be in every activity they were in? Do we want to approach our work life the same way we used to? Or, are we willing to consider living more like Jesus, which means embracing slow.

Imagine if we did that, how our work life could actually improve, as we are more creative and effective when we do work, how our relationships with people would deepen, with God deepen, our characters deepen. It's ironic, but true: the fastest way to get to where we want to go is slow. We can't speed our way to depth.

So, what does that mean? It means changing our pace. It means embracing interruptions as opportunities. It means embracing R&R as a spiritual discipline. It means embracing relationships, meaning unhurried time, in a whole new way.

These changes are hard, and God can help us. We need the help of other people too. So, seek it out. Talk about this with a trusted friend. Talk about it as a married couple. Talk about it as a whole family. As we move toward the new normal, are we willing to embrace a slower approach to life? What changes would we make?

Pray.