

"Extreme busyness, whether at school or college, kirk or market, is a symptom of deficient vitality."

—Robert Louis Stevenson

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Always on Call

Let me say up front that I am *not* a phone person. My position requires my being always on call, so I do not mind talking on the phone when necessary. However, I prefer face-to-face conversation or written communication. Call me strange or old-fashioned, but it is the truth.

At the heart of the matter, phone conversation makes me a little uncomfortable because it forces me to feel that I have to say something, and often I really have nothing worthwhile to say. I feel I am a better listener than talker—despite my long-winded sermons and sermonettes. So, for me, telephone conversation stresses talking more than listening, and communication is thereby diminished. As we all know, real, effective communication requires both, and as an editor and preacher, I am all for that.

So much of our modern life, however, revolves around telecommunication. Our homes have several phones in them. We connect to the Internet by telephone. Some of our cars sport them. Many people believe—and I do not use the word lightly—that one must have a cell phone. They seem to be indispensable to a growing number of people.

But must I have a cell phone? Do I really need the extra monthly expense? Do I have to relate certain information right now? Can I not wait until I tell the person directly? Has life become so immediate that even minor matters cannot wait a few minutes?

Honestly, there are some times when I do not want to be reached by telephone. For instance, driving anywhere in my car is one of those times. I like to spend this time thinking, listening to the radio, or simply enjoying the drive. My car is a refuge from the pressing demands of the day. (And, yes, I sincerely believe talking on a phone while driving impairs one's driving abilities. I have seen too many examples to believe otherwise.)

This may sound like a case of the gripes—and maybe it is in part—but it is also a symptom of the times. Americans are busy people, full of activities and plans to be active. We demand instant everything because, if we have to wait, some activity must be curtailed, and that messes up our plans. Many processed foods are instant because, in our busyness, we hardly have time to eat! And, yes, our phones make communication—with our family members, with coworkers, with the hairdresser, with the garage, with the retailer, etc.—instant and timesaving.

[God](#) Himself prophesies of this frenetic society of ours in [Daniel 12:4](#): "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." That "many shall run to and fro" implies a great deal of activity is plain, but it has a psychological connotation as well. "Run to and fro" can also be rendered many shall be "at their wit's end" (*New English Bible*) or "search anxiously" (*The Amplified Bible*). The picture it paints is of a world gone mad with ceaseless activity, worry, frustration, and loss of direction.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves, "Have we joined the mayhem?" How appropriate is it for a Christian to take on the world's frenzied pace? Have we joined the rat race? Do we demand that others match our stride? Have we become distracted from what is truly important to our salvation? Have the cares of this life made us anxious and steered us toward ungodly goals ([Matthew 6:25-34](#))? Maybe we should sit down in a quiet place to analyze our priorities and motivations and to reorganize our days to place the emphasis on the things that really count.

The phones here at the church office have been out for nine days, and I will admit, it has been nice, quiet, peaceful, undemanding. I have seen my productivity increase. I have been able to think about certain ideas, problems, and projects for long stretches without interruption. It has been refreshing.

I know that phones are necessary, and I really do not begrudge them or the people who use them. Telecommunications are integral to our work, and we are eagerly awaiting resumption of service. Yet, now I think I have a better idea why God commands a day of rest each week ([Exodus 20:8-11](#)), a day we can leave this mad world and its anxieties, pursuits, and distractions, and enter a tranquil time of [peace](#), stillness, and quiet in which the real work of righteousness gets done ([James 3:17-18](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Be Still!](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, reflecting upon the end-time proclivity of "running to and fro" like so many ants, concludes that this life's rushed tempo is not something of God. He did not intend for us to live in such a fast-paced, stress-filled world. We need to cultivate the practice of slowing down, getting out of the "rat race" and being still, stopping our frenetic lifestyles to get in sync with God. Being still (curtailing movement and speech) is to our mental, emotional, and spiritual health as fasting is to our physical health. It helps us to get in the right attitude, to see righteous reasoning, to receive instruction, to see God at work in and for us, and to know God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Sharpening Our Saws

by William Gray

God has provided us with the Sabbath for many reasons, but one of them is certainly as a time to sharpen our focus each week. William Gray shows that preparation is the key to getting the most out of the Sabbath.

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