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Slowing Down

by Sue Judd - Grand Haven

There is a memorable line at the end of the movie "Boyhood": "Rather than people seizing moments, moments seize people."

I thought about this as I finished John Mark Comer's "The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry." His straightforward book offers gentle wisdom on how to simplify your life and grow closer to God and your family.

How many moments over the years have I seized?

We all want to live intentionally and authentically. Our children with special needs personify this because they can't be anything but themselves. Their honesty, their fierce loyalty to their family and friends, should inspire us all.

But instead of treasuring these endearing traits, I want to hurry him so he is like the rest of us. On so many days I find myself at the threshold of my son's room, wanting to let him sleep but at the same time, knowing that we have an appointment. I quietly open the door.

"Hurry, hurry," he says, his brow furrowing above his handsome face before he sticks his head back under the covers. I wear the same expression when something is demanded of me. "Let's get going," he adds, as he slowly throws back his comforter.

I sigh as I realize he is parroting my words, imitating my irritation with the finesse of an Academy Award winning actor. I look at my watch. If he gets up and gets ready, we have a shot of making it on time.

Sometimes I wonder if our daily lives are a series of push me, pull you, let's get up, get going and, by the way, we still are going to be late. You can't hurry a person like my son or it just ends up taking longer. That's a fact. That's Autism 101.

I was so proud that we stayed busy. When he was in school, he had something nearly every late afternoon or evening. I joked that I was a soccer mom without the soccer. What a long day that must have been for him. I know that I spent countless hours in waiting rooms, reading and praying that he would talk. It was hard for me. I can only imagine how hard it was for him, working all day at school and then having to work some more.

One day he was seeing a beloved therapist and he managed to communicate by typing that everyone was so serious. He wanted people to feel comfortable joking with him. So, the therapist had him read a couple jokes that he could share. He has a very literal mind so I'm not sure if he found them funny. At the end of the session, he charged excitedly into the waiting room, telling me, "Because it's too far to walk!"

I blinked, looking up from my book. He was so sweet and so earnest. But he had rushed to the punchline, forgetting to tell me the first line of the familiar joke: "Why do birds fly south in the winter?" Did he get this from me, was I rushing to the punchline, too?

I wonder sometimes about my hurry up and wait existence. So much time spent waiting...for my son, for medical test results, for a vacant checkout line at the store. The list goes on. A mom in Bible study put it in perspective for me. She said that our children with special needs, just by virtue of the wonderful way they are made, allow us the gift of slowing down. She is right.

With another child, there might have been countless hours after school and weekends spent at a hockey rink or at a soccer field. Like so many families we know, we might have gone nonstop from the time he was in preschool until high school graduation. We never stopped striving for our son to be the best version of himself, but even with all the therapies it was a gentler path. Life became so much better when we followed his lead. We built in more time for him to get ready so it didn't feel as rushed. We made time to visit the art museum, one of his favorite places. Without his insistence, I might have given the paintings in the gallery only a cursory glance. My son studies each one with the precision of a watchmaker, and reads aloud every short biography of the artist. We look, we learn. We spend a lot of time there.

My son's place in a world that doesn't fully understand him isn't easy. My heart breaks watching him struggle to communicate. I grow weary of explaining my life, even the Reader's Digest version of it, when friends and relatives ask how my husband and I spend our days. Most people our age take month-long excursions to faraway places. Our frontier is right in our living room, with the child, now an adult, chosen for us. He is a gift from God. The moments I seize with him are precious, and I am blessed beyond measure.



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