

Preface

WE LIVE IN a world in which busyness and twenty-four hour availability are becoming the norm. Many articles and books have been written during the past decade applauding and critiquing this subject, yet rarely does an author seek to engage the reader in the personal struggle to identify the effects of too much activity and the hard work of coming to terms with it. Even rarer is the choice of the writer to be vulnerable with the reader in sharing a faith journey that becomes transformative.

In her book *Recess: Rediscovering Play and Purpose*, Laurie Haller has written with candor and honesty about her ongoing journey to wholeness. Aware that her life in ministry was leading to burnout, she had the courage to seek out time for a three-month leave in order to regain her passion for life. Taking time out sounds appealing and restful. Yet faced with the gift of time and lack of the previous activities in which she invested herself beyond limits, Laurie had to face what each person taking life seriously must encounter: oneself. This is no easy task, for solitude and silence have a way of confronting us

with a truth that cannot be obtained in the hustle and bustle of our frenetic society.

In many ways our society has ‘canonized’ busyness. Work production is often measured in quantity rather than quality. Individuals who achieve are given more time-consuming responsibilities. Recent studies have shown that many workers often do not take full advantage of the amount of vacation time given and choose to stay in the workplace or at home in front of the computer screen. Is our sense of leisure becoming a lost art? Does the temptation to busyness diminish our desire for prayer, reflection, thinking or writing? How often do we hear individuals state that their days have been busy with lists to accomplish and tasks to perform! How rarely do we hear that one is busy contemplating underlying values that affect choices or that one is choosing solitude to sit with God and listen to the pulse of one’s own life and one’s connection with all life held in the embrace of the Divine. To choose a centered life is not always understood in our present day milieu, yet what would our world be like if more chose to live in an appreciation of our oneness rather than focus on differences that breed separation?

The complexities and busyness of daily life are as present to those who are in ordained ministry or any call to service. The perceptions may be that these individuals are exempt from the stressors listed above. After all, are not they doing God’s work? To read the Gospel of Mark in one sitting may leave one with the impression that even Jesus lived a frenetic pace of life. Upon closer examination, however, we notice that he would take the time to go apart to commune with his Father. Our curiosity is spiked as we wonder what his experience in those holy encounters might be. It would seem that these times deepened his awareness of his identity and affirmed his sense of mission as he continued the journey to Jerusalem to embrace that which would occur in the days ahead.

In my ministry of spiritual direction, I have often listened to the stories of those involved in ministry. In these stories

they relate feelings of a strong disconnect with their lives of discipleship, citing the lack of time and energy to integrate the message and mission of Jesus into their own lives. Recognizing the ‘chronic emptiness’ of her own spirit, Laurie made the choice to withdraw from the normal day to day routines and seek the God who invited her to look at her life, her spirit. Reading the table of contents in the book, one notices the profound movements from disengagement and floundering to the freedom to be able to waste time with Jesus, leading her to a transformation of spirit rooted in the Word of God. For Laurie the journey was a profound experience of self-knowledge and an understanding of her relationship with God.

While spending time with *Recess*, the reader will notice that the spiritual journey necessitates growth in self-knowledge as well as trust in a deepening relationship with God. The two are essential. What we see in Laurie’s writing is her intentional growth in self-knowledge, especially as she faces what she calls her work obsession. Coupled with that is her growing openness to the transforming power of God silently happening as she says ‘yes.’ There is a noticeable movement in Laurie’s writings during her sabbatical from awareness of inadequacies to the powerful experience of knowing she is loved for who she is, as she is. Ingrained messages of duty and performance are melted away. Self-acceptance before God is humbling, yet it is this stance that makes one more available to others and for ministry.

Laurie Haller chose to embrace life-giving questions during her three-month sabbatical. For her it was indeed a mountain-top experience. And, as with any such experience, the coming down from the mountain into the ordinary of each day is fertile ground for the deepening of relationship with God. Anyone who has been in relationship is most likely familiar with this movement. Laurie’s desire to integrate her desert experience into daily life and ministry is well expressed in her final chapter. The Epilogue written years afterwards reminds us that the God of great consolation will also be the

consoling Presence in times of suffering. No longer is the message “What can I do for God?” but “What will I allow God to accomplish in this world through me?”

Recess: Rediscovering Play and Purpose is an engaging reflection, not only for those in ministry, but for all intent on living a life where discernment or awareness of God’s action in one’s life and in the world becomes the basis for choices and responses. This book is for all of us who desire to have a listening heart that exudes the compassion and mercy of God. This is a book that inspires the reader to look at one’s own life and ask similar questions that evoke honesty, integrity and a ‘yes’ to the grace offered by the Creator.

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