



Contemplative Exercise

Embracing Dormancy

Scott Bessenecker November 23, 2016

Abstract: *This exercise helps participants grow their identity in Christ and their value apart from achievement or a "doing" posture. It is best done in groups of 10 or more.*

Work Ethic Exercise

Tell participants that you are going to give them a picture of how much of our life is available for work. Emphasize that God commands us to go out and make disciples of all nations and to strive first for the Kingdom of God and all else will be added to us (Matt. 6:33 NRSV). Feel free to wax eloquent about the urgency of the task and the amount of kingdom work yet to be accomplished.

Visualizing available work hours

Tell participants to line up along the wall or around the room if a large group. If it is a very large group, simply have them stand up at their seats. Tell them that their bodies represent the 87,350 hours available to work for God's kingdom in a 10-year period. Encourage them to look around and appreciate all that could be done with those hours.

1. God created us with a forced shut-down for roughly 8 hours of every 24. These are unavailable to us for working. Have 33% of the group sit down.
2. God commanded that we should do no work one day in seven. This means an additional 10% of our waking hours are unavailable for work. Have another 10% sit down.
3. God commanded the Israelites to take 1 year every 7 off from planting and harvesting. For an agrarian society this was a costly command, but it was God's invitation to rest. Have another 10% sit down.

INTERVARSITY

4. There are several weeks of yearly feasts in the Scripture where the Israelites are commanded to “do no work.” Have another 5% sit down.
5. God could have made us like plants, simply being fed by the natural elements without requiring any work on our part. But God made us in such a way that we need to grow food, prepare food, and care for our bodies. These necessary acts of sustaining life mean we are limited in the things we can get done for God or others. Have another 10% sit down.

Roughly 2/3rds of the group should be seated.

Another Visualization Exercise

Leave this previous exercise un-commented upon and have everyone seek a comfortable position. If room allows, give people permission to lie down. If not, encourage them to get comfortable in their seats, closing their eyes and relaxing their body as best they can.

Speaking slowly and clearly have them imagine themselves on a cool summer's day sitting by a stream and simply watching it flow. Be descriptive about the pleasantness of the day and location. Give them a moment to get into that space.

As thoughts crowd their minds – things to get done, conversations they've had or need to have, worries the face, etc. – challenge them to picture that thought or worry as a little stick and invite them to toss it into the stream and watch it float down the river. Tell them that there will be time to think about that thing another time. Right now, they are to let go of all worries and cares as best they can.

When you sense enough time has passed tell them that Jesus is present with them by the lake. Perhaps they are leaning back-to-back, or maybe Jesus is simply sitting very close. They can feel the warmth of his arm against theirs and feel completely safe in his presence.

Tell them that Jesus does not at this time want to hear their prayers or thoughts or have conversation. Jesus just wants to be next to them. He simply wants to be in their presence. Furthermore, he has nothing he particularly wants to share with them right now. He is content just to be with them. No talking, no action, just being near is enough for him.

INTERVARSITY

Choose several of your reflections from the retreat, and share them with a friend, mentor or supervisor. Discuss your own assessment and plans for future growth.

Ask one or more people who know you well to also answer a few of the retreat questions about you. Then with a friend or supervisor, reflect on the similarities and differences between your own answers and those of the other person.

Debrief

1. How did you feel/what did you think when you recognized how little time is available to “get stuff done for God?”
2. Have you connected your sense of worth to what you do? How does God measure our value? Is it connected to what we get done?
3. Were you able to allow your cares to float downstream and enter into Jesus’ presence. If so, what was that like? If not what made this difficult?

Take this opportunity as a leader to teach on having a sense of identity or worth outside of our activities.

Hear the Word

Conduct a manuscript study on Psalm 23. Lean into God as the chief actor and our value apart from what we do.

Respond Actively

Invite participants to discuss how they have tied their sense of worth and identity to their accomplishments. Challenge them to build in time to their day for meditation on God and God’s word and leaning into dormancy and inactivity as a spiritual exercise.