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PAYING ATTENTION MATTERS

We can't help being aware of the constant competition for our attention. Think of the millions of dollars spent on the Super Bowl commercials, the annoying pop up ads when you are trying to read something on the internet, the catalogues and junk mail we get almost daily. Others are trying to focus our attention on their causes, agendas, and ideologies to keep us scrolling and believing whatever they want us to buy into. Why? Because the fact is that we give away our lives or SPEND them on whatever or whomever we PAY our attention.

This fact was brought to my attention when I recently read this quote from *Four Thousand Weeks* by Oliver Burkman: "Attention just is life, your experience of being alive consists of nothing other than the sum of everything to which you PAY attention. At the end of your life, looking back, whatever compelled your attention from moment to moment is simply what your life has been. When you PAY attention to something you don't especially value, it's not an exaggeration to say you are PAYING with your life."

I realize my attention is not limitless, but do I treat it as I do my money or other valuable resources? It's our most precious commodity yet how often do I fritter it away on senseless stuff? John Eldredge in the book *Waking the Dead*, makes the point: "We have no idea who we really are, why we are here, what is happening to us, or why. Honestly most days we are alert and oriented times zero. Sleepwalking through life."

What is the remedy for using the precious gift of time and attention more wisely? In thinking about how to go about our daily lives, I love what Kate Bowler has to say in her recent podcast titled *Making Dinner While the World Burns*, "The world may be on fire, but this is where God meets us. Awake now. Paying attention. Still choosing what is human." Another devotion I read by Nigel Darius puts it this way: "Attention is the purest form of intimacy. One of the most meaningful ways we can

love someone is by gifting them the thing most valuable to us- our lives. The people right in front of us every day are worth our attention. We ought to act in such a way that devotes days, hours, minutes and seconds of our lives to appreciating our people while we have them.”

God has provided spiritual practices that will keep us paying attention to how we SPEND our lives. Keeping the Sabbath is one way. We learned in the Words of Love study of the 10 Commandments that the purpose of the Sabbath is to get us to STOP and focus on who we are, where we are and who God is now. Doing this has the power to change the future.

In our upcoming Lenten study book, Pause, the author writes this in the introduction: “The culture in which we are embedded doesn’t invite or encourage us to pause, to lay aside our perpetual activity...It requires our immediate and constant attention.... Meals and even conversations are interrupted by the dinging of a text message that must be read immediately - now not later! Pausing is truly countercultural.

The season of Lent offers a limited time frame for taking up a spiritual practice that can help you to focus more deeply on your life of faith, the convictions and questions that you sense are emerging by slowing down and being present. We know from research that brains can respond to the many demands for their attention only so long before a break is required, a space for refreshment. Just as Jesus needed to get away at times to pray, so, too, do his followers, especially in a world requiring our attention in so many different directions. Think of Lent as a refreshing time in your life to nourish your soul.”

Let’s use it to PAY attention to how we are SPENDING our valuable time.

~Written by Marilyn Whisner

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