

# Slowing Down to the Speed of Life

by Carolyn W. Treadway

**L**IFE has its own cycles, rhythms, and processes, which need to be honored for maximum benefit, or to prevent disastrous consequences. Gestation, for example, cannot be speeded up. Yet in 21st century America, who has enough time for life, for *living*?

Our society, and our cultural expectations, seem to require us to live in “fast forward,” asking more of us than we can sustain over time. We are using ourselves up, and using up our planet. Everything seems accelerated. Rainwater, which in the old days sank into the soil, streams, and water tables, now rushes across paved-over lands, erodes the stream banks, and causes floods and subsequent droughts.

Similarly, we are deluged with incessant information which we cannot absorb, and which does not sink into us to become knowledge and eventual wisdom. Children growing up are too often rushed from one activity to another, without time to play in the sand or discover shapes in the clouds. Because of busy schedules, many families have carpools instead of family meals, thus depriving children of shared “wisdom time” around the table. All of us are affected by the current speed of life, and the sum total very much affects our planet.

As a therapist and life coach, I frequently hear people’s distress at being overworked and overwhelmed. I hear variations on themes of:

- ✿ Incessant pressure and busyness.
- ✿ Ever-rising expectations, never-ending demands.
- ✿ Multi-tasking, no time to concentrate
- ✿ Fatigue, restlessness.
- ✿ Breakdown of relationships and social networks. Intimacy famine.
- ✿ Disconnection from nature.
- ✿ Lack of focus and meaning.
- ✿ Soul-hunger, spiritual void.

There is *no* time for rest, reflection, heart opening, or spiritual deepening! Many people crave something different, but don’t know what or how to find it. In 1941, Thomas Kelly wrote words even more relevant today: “Strained by the very made pace of our daily outer burdens... over the margins of life comes a whisper, a faint call, a premonition of richer living which we know we are passing by.”

Kelly invites us to honor our fundamental Quaker testimony of simplicity: “Life is meant to be lived from a divine Center. Each one of us can live a life of amazing power and peace and serenity, of integration and confidence... on one condition, that is *if we really want to.*”

## *Slowing down frees time and space for spiritual connection and reverence for life.*

Life coaches, like Quakers, raise queries: Are you living your own life as you really want to? Are you living from a divine Center? What is really important to you? What are your key values, priorities, passions, testimonies, witnesses? Does your life actually reflect and honor these?

I would first ask you to reflect on your own life and whether you are living it as you truly wish to live. What is *really* important to you? What are your key values, priorities, and passions? Does your life actually reflect and honor these? What do you want more of, and less of, in your life? What brings you energy, fulfillment, and joy? Since you and the planet are profoundly interconnected, what are the contributions you want to offer to our world?

Life itself is sacred. Time and energy are gifts from our Creator. Are you using them reverently? Is there time in your life for reverence? Slowing down to the speed of life does not

mean dropping out or doing without. It does mean deliberately creating your life through the power of choice. Clearly and with commitment, tend what is really important to you, and do much less of what isn’t. Your beliefs and values guide your priorities. So will God’s leadings on how to use your time, energies, and talents, if you create space to discern them.

### Where can you start?

- ✿ Slow down! Just breathe. Rest, reflect a while, take time to pray. Then slowly, bit by bit, reclaim your own life.
- ✿ Develop a spiritual practice to center your days.
- ✿ Make careful choices about how you use your precious, finite time and energy. Join the “Take Back Your Time” movement (see Resources). To clear the time for what you really want, what will you have to cease doing? Are you asking more of yourself than the clock will allow, or than you could possibly do? If so, you are not living sustainably.
- ✿ Consider your energy. What activities and involvements feed you and bless you? Which drain you and stress you? Increase the former, weed out the latter.

**M**ANY of us middle class North Americans, so wealthy by world standards, come to feel possessed by our possessions. Not only is our time completely filled, but our drawers, closets, houses, and garages are overflowing. Papers seem to multiply like rabbits. Clutter overwhelms us. We need ways to confront our burden of stuff and to make choices to let go of some of it. Look at each item through the criteria of, “Do you truly love it?” “Does it lift your energy?” and “Is it genuinely useful?” If not, why keep it? Can you buy *only* what you need and will use?

Over >>

>> *Choices, continued*

**S**LOWING down is not easy in today's culture. It will take diligence and care to do so. But you *can* do it, one small choice at a time. Pace yourself, at a rate you can continue over time. Get support for making choices and changes. Act now: Commit yourself to three *small* steps that you *will* take *this* week toward creating the life you really want, steps such as, "I will play with my child this evening" or "I will rest 15 minutes daily" or "I will clean out my top desk drawer" or "I will not serve on the X Committee."

Choose your commitments, post them where you will see them, and *do* them. Tell someone you trust that you *will* do these things, then report in a week that you have done them. Doing this weekly, you will be surprised by what a difference it *will* make over time.

The simple life begins inside us, with our connection to the Divine. Slowing down frees time and space for spiritual connection and reverence for life. We must act on what our hearts already know: All life is sacred. Everything is connected. From this space, we can create a world we are proud to leave to our children and all future generations. Reverence for life empowers us to take responsibility for, and to care for, ourselves and each other. Through our choices and actions of love for the sacredness of life, we re-member our own lives, and we contribute to the renewal of our planet.

### What Quaker Meetings can do

- ✿ Support individuals and families experiencing difficulty in simplifying their lives.
- ✿ Sponsor study groups to address these concerns. Materials could include:
  - The "Voluntary Simplicity" study guide from the Northwest Earth Institute.
  - Relevant Quaker writings, such as those of Thomas Kelly and John Woolman.
  - Other books from the following Resources.

## Resources

### Books

- Burch, Mark A., 1995. *Simplicity*. (Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers)
- Kelly, Thomas, 1941. *A Testament of Devotion*. (New York: Harper & Brothers) pp. 115–16.
- Kingston, Karen, 1999. *Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui*. (New York: Broadway Books)
- Moore, Thomas, 1992. *Care of the Soul, a Guide to Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*. (New York: HarperCollins)
- Muller, Wayne, 1999. *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*. (New York: Bantam Books)
- Pierce, Linda Breen, 2003. *Simplicity Lessons a 12-Step Guide to Living Simply*. (Carmel, Calif.: Gallagher Press)
- Pipher, Mary, 1996. *In the Shelter of Each Other*. (New York: Random House)
- Popov, Linda Kavelin et al., 2004. *Pace of Grace*. (New York: Plume, Penguin Group)

### Websites

- Joanna Macy <[www.joannamacy.net](http://www.joannamacy.net)>
- Northwest Earth Institute <[www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org)>
- Pace of Grace <[www.paceofgrace.net](http://www.paceofgrace.net)>
- Sacred Lifeboats <[www.sacredlifeboats.com](http://www.sacredlifeboats.com)>
- Simple Living <[www.simpleliving.net](http://www.simpleliving.net)>
- Take Back Your Time <[www.simpleliving.net/timeday](http://www.simpleliving.net/timeday)>

### Workshops/Life Coaching.

For more information about workshops and life coaching on simplicity, slowing down, and sustainability topics, please contact Carolyn Treadway in care of:

#### Quaker Earthcare Witness

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## Simplicity as Spiritual Exercise series

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*Quaker simplicity does not seek the security of things but opens the soul to both the vulnerability and the wonder of Creation.*

**Quaker Earthcare Witness**