

# Slowing

I like rules.

There, I said it.

Why is everybody so down on rules? What did rules ever do to them? Was there a recent imperialistic rule kleptocracy I missed?

Rules make me feel safe. When I know the rules, I breathe easy.

You're thinking, *Oh brother...*

Judgers gonna judge, but I'm a high J on the Myers-Briggs. And, well, I like to have a plan. For everything. I literally sit down before my day off and plan it out by the hour.

Mock me all you want, but I normally have a *really* good day off.

I'm old enough and (hopefully) wise enough to know my personality and laugh about it, living in a way that works for me and not judging my antinomian friends who have other personality types or are in other stages of life. That said, I've started to notice that anti-rule

people are often anti-schedule people; and anti-schedule people frequently live in a way that is *reactive*, not *proactive*. As more passenger than driver, consumer than creator. Life happens *to* them, more than *through* them.<sup>1</sup>

Again, the truism: we achieve inner peace when our schedules are aligned with our values. To translate to our apprenticeships to Jesus: if our values are life with Jesus and a growing in maturity toward love, joy, and peace, then our schedules and the set of practices that make up our days and weeks, which together essentially constitute our rules of life, are the ways we achieve inner peace.

Before you anti-rule-P-on-the-MBTI-test people cringe and toss this book across the room, think about it: Could a rule of life even be fun?

There's a new idea in the self-help literature called *gamification*. Basically, the idea is to turn your personal growth into little games. A recent bestseller had the subtitle *The Power of Living Gamefully*.<sup>2</sup> I like that. JMC has a new goal: live gamefully.

So, gameful person that I now am, I'm always on the hunt for little games to play—fun, creative, flexible “rules” to slow down the overall pace of my one-click-below-hurried life.

These rules have just been floating around in the back of my head, so I sat down and put them into writing. Hence, this chapter. Some of the rules are deep and profound; most are quirky and odd. Pick and choose. Steal whatever sounds fun; roll your eyes at the rest.

But before we start, you may be thinking, *Wait, how are these spiritual disciplines?* Well, on one level they aren't. And that's okay, possibly even wise. Jesus lived in a village in the first century, not a city in the twenty-first. Jesus didn't drive a car or field text messages, and a late-night run to Taco Bell wasn't an option. What follows are modern practices based on my attempt at following Jesus while living in a city, raising a family, and having a smartphone, Wi-Fi

access, etc. Could it be that we need a few new spiritual disciplines to survive the modern world? Counterhabits to wage war against what the futurist David Zach called “hyperliving—skimming along the surface of life”<sup>3</sup>

So while you won’t find the following rules on any standard list of the spiritual disciplines, you *will* find more and more teachers of the way talking about it, as a protest against the new normal of hyperliving.

John Ortberg and Richard Foster both labeled this emerging practice the spiritual discipline of “slowing.”<sup>4</sup> Ortberg defined it as “cultivating patience by deliberately choosing to place ourselves in positions where we simply have to wait.”<sup>5</sup>

The basic idea behind the practice of slowing is this: slow down your body, slow down your life.

We are *embodied* creatures. Whole people. Our minds are the portals to our whole persons, so how we think has all sorts of ramifications for how we experience life with God. But the mind is not the only portal.

This is why, for example, so few Westerners fast anymore. What was once a core practice for the way of Jesus has fallen by the wayside.<sup>6</sup> We can’t fathom a practice that comes at life change through our *stomachs*. We’re so used to books and podcasts and university lectures and teachings at church that we often forget: We’re not just brains on legs. We’re whole people. Holistic, integrated, complex, and full of a dizzying amount of energy. So our apprenticeships to Jesus have to be whole-person endeavors. Mind *and* body.

And if we can slow down both—the pace at which we think and the pace at which we move our bodies through the world—maybe we can slow down our *souls* to a pace at which they can “taste and see that the LORD is good.”<sup>7</sup> And that life in his world is good too.

That said, here are twenty ideas for slowing down your overall pace of life. Yup, twenty. I warned you, I like rules.

Let's start with something most of us do daily: drive a car. Even if you live in the city like me and walk or ride your bike most days, the odds are, you still drive on a semi-regular basis. I live right downtown, but I still drive two or three times a week. Here are a few ideas to gamify driving into the spiritual discipline of slowing.

### **1. Drive the speed limit.**

This is a revolutionary idea, never before thought of in a book! If the sign indicates twenty-five miles per hour, *drive twenty-five miles per hour!* Not thirty miles per hour. Not thirty-three (what *can* I get away with?).

Note: not *below* the speed limit—that's just annoying. We'll all hate you.

But right on the money.

Sometimes I do silly things like this just to detox my brain from its addiction to dopamine and the instant gratification of a life of speed. In this case, literally.

### **2. Get into the slow lane.**

Just rock it with Grandma in the Oldsmobile. Or the semi hauling Walmart contraband.

Settle in. Feel the wheel, the road. Watch the scenery pass. Use it as a chance to practice *presence*—to God, to the world, to your own soul.

If you think about it, driving is a great time to pray. Some of my best prayer times are on morning car rides. As I said, I normally ride my

bike to get around town, but every few weeks I take an early morning ride across the city to therapy. Overall, I hate driving (one of the reasons I love living in a city), but I look forward to my drive all week long because I know it's a great time to enjoy Jesus' company.

### **3. Come to a full stop at stop signs.**

None of this California nonsense.

By the way, next time you try this, notice how *hard* it is. Maybe that's because I'm from California. But maybe it's because I feel like I'm not moving fast enough, or even because *I'm* not enough...there's that disordered heart, right under the surface of my hurry.

### **4. Don't text and drive.**

I should not need to say this; it is, well, *illegal* after all. And the cause of thousands of deaths a year. Our hurry is literally killing us.

But there's a reason most of us text and drive even when we know it's illegal and a life-and-death issue. We're so addicted to the dopamine hit that is our phones that we literally can't just sit in our cars and listen to music or the news or pray or talk with our passengers. We *have* to reach for our phones and risk our necks (and those of others) to get our fix.

Remember the 1950s when people would just go "driving"? Okay, I was born in 1980, so I don't actually remember, but you get the idea. Gender-stereotype warning: the man would wear driving gloves, the woman a colorful head scarf. Let's bring it back: driving.

### **5. Show up ten minutes early for an appointment, sans phone.**

What could you do with ten full leisurely minutes? Bring back coffee-table magazines from the late '90s? Chat with a human being waiting beside you? Read a book?

Here's an idea: What if you prayed?

## **6. Get in the longest checkout line at the grocery store.**

Aah, you're all hating on me now! In an efficiency-obsessed culture, why would we do *that*? That's literally wasting time on purpose.

Well, here's why I do it (sometimes, not always): it's a way to slow down my life and deal with the hurry in my soul. It gives me a few minutes to come off the drug of speed. To pray. To take an inventory of my emotional and spiritual vitals. And, when I get up to the cashier, to express the love of the Father toward him or her, simply by saying hello, asking a few questions, and saying thank you. (Rather than my default of paying for my items while texting with work, while podcasting via headphones, all the while treating the poor cashier like an ATM instead of a soul.)

But here's the deeper motivation: it's wise to regularly deny ourselves from getting what we want, whether through a practice as intense as fasting or as minor as picking the longest checkout line. That way when somebody *e/se* denies us from getting what we want, we don't respond with anger. We're already acclimated. We don't have to get our way to be happy. Naturally, this takes a while for most of us. So start small, at aisle three.

## **7. Turn your smartphone into a dumbphone.**

A number of years ago, Jake Knapp's article "My Year with a Distraction-Free iPhone (and How to Start Your Own Experiment)" hit the internet like wildfire, and a lot of us joined the movement.<sup>8</sup>

Okay, there's no movement. Just my friend Josh and me. But we're into it.

Since then the catchphrase has become the "dumbphone." As in, well, you get it.

There's no official checklist, but here's what we suggest:

- Take email off your phone.
- Take all social media off your phone, transfer it to a desktop, and schedule set times to check it each day or, ideally, each week.
- Disable your web browser. I'm a bit lenient on this one since I hate surfing the web on my phone and use this only when people send me links. But this is typically a key facet of a dumbphone.
- Delete all notifications, including those for texts. I set my phone so I have to (1) unlock it and (2) click on the text message box to (3) even see if I have any text messages. This was a game changer.
- Ditch news apps or at least news alerts. They are the devil.
- Delete every single app you don't need or that doesn't make your life seriously easier. And keep all the wonder apps that do make life so much easier—maps, calculator, Alaska Airlines, etc. What Knapp put in one box and labeled "The Future."
- Consolidate said apps into a few simple boxes so your home screen is free and clear.
- Finally, set your phone to grayscale mode. This does something neurobiologically that I'm not smart enough to explain, something to do with decreasing dopamine addiction. Google it.

If right now you're thinking, *Why don't you just get a flip phone?* Point taken. So...

**8. Get a flip phone. Or ditch your cell phone all together.**

For post-hipsters with money, get the Punkt phone or the Light Phone II. For the rest of us, trek to your local T-Mobile, which surprisingly has options with no fruit on the back.

**9. Parent your phone; put it to bed before you and make it sleep in.**

T's and my phones "go to bed" at the same time as our kids: 8:30 p.m., sharp. We literally set them to airplane mode and put them in a drawer in the kitchen. Otherwise we burn time and end up frying our brains with blue screens rather than winding down for bed with a good book or, you know, couples stuff.

**10. Keep your phone off until after your morning quiet time.**

The stats are ominous: 75 percent of people sleep next to their phones, and 90 percent of us check our phones immediately upon waking.<sup>9</sup>

I can't think of a *worse* way to start my day than a text from my work, a glance at email, a quick (sure...) scroll through social media, and a news alert about that day's outrage.

That is a surefire recipe for anger, not love. Misery, not joy. And definitely not peace.

Listen: do not let your phone set your emotional equilibrium and your news feed set your view of the world.

At the risk of coming off angsty and political, remember, "freedom of the press" is a myth. Yes, the press is free from Washington, DC's oversight, which I'm all for. But they are still in slavery to the bottom line. Journalism is a for-profit business—this is capitalism, friends, no matter how far left the journalist may sound. And the reality is, for reasons both neurobiological and theological, *bad news sells*. And



clickbaity bad news that has something to do with a celebrity (in other words, meaningless trivia) sells even better.

As a result, our morning news feed is *not* an accurate picture of the world. It is curated, not only with a sociopolitical agenda that is thoroughly secular (on both the left and the right) but also with an eye to all that is evil in the world, rarely to *any* of what is good. Because bad news is where the money is.

Don't misread me here; I'm not saying you should close your eyes to injustice in the world. Da-de-dah-de-dah, I can't hear you!

What I'm saying is, let *prayer* set your emotional equilibrium and *Scripture* set your view of the world. Begin your day in the spirit of God's presence and the truth of his Scriptures.

My friends at Red Church in Melbourne, Australia, have this saying: "Win the day." They mean, at the beginning of each day, put your phone on the other side of your house and don't look at it until after you've spent time in devotion to God.

I highly recommend you adopt this practice. This, again, was a game changer for me. A way to keep my priorities in check. More than that, to start my day sitting in love and joy and peace, not getting sucked into the hurry, anxiety, and outrage of the world.

Again, none of this is legalistic. These ideas are simply self-imposed guardrails to keep the trajectory of my life between the lines and on the path (read: way) to life.

### ***11. Set times for email.***

This isn't only my suggestion; pretty much every self-help writer, time-management guru, workplace-efficiency expert, opinion blogger, etc. all say the same thing.

Do *not* have email on your phone.

Do *not* glance at it when you get a free moment in the elevator or in a boring meeting.

Do *not* answer random emails throughout the day.

Instead: set a time to do email and stick to it.

I have the luxury of doing email only once a week. Every Monday morning at ten o'clock, I open my inbox and don't stop until I'm down to zero. For the rest of the week, I have an auto reply that basically says, I'll get back to you on Monday.

There are some cons to this approach, but for me the pros far outweigh them.

For most people this is wildly unrealistic—I get it. Figure out what works for you. Most experts recommend you don't check email more than twice a day, say nine o'clock and four o'clock—at the beginning and near the end of your workday. Each time, take your inbox to zero if you can. If there's a task, don't leave it hanging in your email chain; get it onto a to-do list for later.

Unless you're an executive assistant or in some kind of job that requires constant email vigilance, this will save you hours each week. Remember: the more email you do, *the more email you do*. Email pings off itself. That's why when you get back from a long vacation and you're expecting to spend three days going through email, it usually takes just a few hours. Most of it got worked out—shockingly!—without you.

And wow does that feel good.

## ***12. Set a time and a time limit for social media (or just get off it).***

In the same vein social media is a black hole. As a tool it's fine. But it's rarely just a tool.

I “have” to be on social media for my work. (Okay, I don’t actually have to be on it, but I love writing. And like many people in the knowledge economy, I have to market my work; hence, I’m on Twitter, which, *shh*, secret: I hate. Not exactly the best place for nuance, in-depth thought, and civility.) So I do the same thing as email—once a week. It’s not on my phone, so I log on with my laptop at the office, answer every tweet—I’m notorious for the week-late reply—and then set up my posts for the week ahead. All two of them.

And I *loathe* Facebook; it’s like the dregs of conservative Christianity. Sorry, I said it. You can post something horrible about me on your page to prove my point.

I enjoy Instagram because I can follow my friends and it’s visual. But I don’t let myself look at it more than once a day.

Otherwise it just eats up my time and, with it, my joy. Thankfully, there are great apps now to cut you off once you’ve reached your daily time allowance.

Clearly I’m not a fun follow on social media, but I’m just fine with that. I’m much more interested in standing up on Sunday and having a lot more than 280 characters’ worth of things to say. So I’ll give my time to that.

### ***13. Kill your TV.***

Anybody remember that bumper sticker? Or did I just hopelessly date myself?

Let you in on a secret: I had that one on my car. The Volkswagen. I know, cliché.

But unlike the rest of my former indie-rock friends, I’m nearing the start of my fifth decade and have never bought a TV. Of course, in

the day and age of online streaming and devices, that means less than it used to.

Even more than social media, TV (and its sibling, film) consumes the lion's share of our so-called free time. For the average American, that is over five hours a day, or thirty-five hours a week. (Note: it's lower for millennials, but that's only because we spend so much time on social media. We're more addicted to entertainment, not less.)<sup>10</sup>

It's the one addiction for which bingeing is still socially acceptable. People now have "Netflix days," where they blow an entire day (or weekend) on multiple seasons of the latest streaming phenomenon. It's like Sabbath gone horribly wrong.

Netflix reports that its average user watches a series in *five days*, with millions bingeing twelve-hour seasons in *a day*.<sup>11</sup>

When asked about the competition from Amazon Prime and other up-and-coming streaming services, Reed Hastings, the CEO of Netflix, shrugged. He said their biggest competition is *sleep*.<sup>12</sup>

And lest you think my crusade is just against time wasted, remember, what we give our attention to is the person we become, for good or evil. As my parents used to tell me, "Garbage in, garbage out." Every...single...thing that we let into our minds will have an *effect* on our souls.

If you fill your mind with fornication and wildly unrealistic portrayals of beauty, or romance and sex, or violence and the quest for revenge, or cynical secular sarcasm that we call "humor," or a parade of opulent wealth, or simple banality, what shape do you think that will give to your soul?

Honestly, there's very little I *can* watch as an apprentice of Jesus. Central to Jesus' vision of human flourishing is a lust-free life (see Matthew 5v27–30, the Sermon on the Mount). I'm all for art, and

even entertainment. But there's very little cinema I can watch that does not incite lust, along with a parade of its ruinous friends. Since the 1920s Hollywood has been at the vanguard of the enemy's quest to degrade sexuality and marriage and desensitize our society to sin. Why make it easy for him?

Occasionally I walk away from a film or show with a sense of wonder, awe, sobriety, or even wisdom. But those inspiring moments are rare.

Why not just get off the crazy train? Kill your TV. I mean, if you want, literally kill it. My friend threw his out the window. Just an idea.

Or here's a more palatable one: set a limit on your entertainment intake. You decide on your number. Two hours a week? Four? Ten? Just set it well below the standard thirty-five.

Our time is our life, and our attention is the doorway to our hearts.

#### **14. *Single-task.***

One of the reasons I'm so pharisaical about my phone, email, and social media is because I've come to realize the obvious: *multitasking is a myth*. Literally. Only God is omnipresent. I inhabit a body. A body that can do only one...thing...at...a...time. Multitasking is just sleight of hand for switching back and forth between a lot of different tasks so I can do them all poorly instead of doing one well.

In the words of a *much* brighter mind, the philosopher Byung-Chul Han:

The attitude toward time and environment known as "multitasking" does not represent civilizational progress....

Rather, such an aptitude amounts to regression. Multitasking is commonplace among wild animals. It is an

attentive technique indispensable for survival in the wilderness....

In the wild, the animal is forced to divide its attention between various activities. That is why animals are incapable of contemplative immersion....

Not just multitasking but also activities such as video games produce a broad but flat mode of attention, which is similar to the vigilance of a wild animal.... Concern for the good life...is yielding more and more to the simple concern for survival.<sup>13</sup>

Or this from the legendary Walter Brueggemann:

Multitasking is the drive to be more than we are, to control more than we do, to extend our power and our effectiveness. Such practice yields a divided self, with full attention given to nothing.<sup>14</sup>

Apparently, I'm not the only one bringing back single-tasking.

No more writing an email while tweeting and fielding text messages on iMessage and listening to music, all while in an open-plan office chatting it up with Sarah in the cubicle next door.

(How's that going for you, anyway?)

I want to be *fully present* to the moment: to God, other people, work in the world, and my own soul. That's more than enough to consume my attention.

I can check the weather and google *Star Wars: Episode X* later.

### **15. Walk slower.**

Okay, some more family-of-origin emo stuff: my dad is type A, like me. When I was a kid, we prided ourselves on how fast we walked.

Weird, but true. I remember Christmas shopping with my dad at the mall and just flying past the rest of the shoppers—*suckers!* We're gonna beat them all to J. C. Penney.

My wife is Latina, from a warm culture. She walks slowly. Actually, she does most things slowly. I cannot tell you how many tiffs we got into as a newly married couple over the speed of our walking! Not making this up: *a lot*.

Fast-forward (wait, “walk” forward?) to today and my slow-life revolution: I've noticed that a lot of the greatest followers of Jesus I know—mentors, spiritual directors, older and wiser Jesusy folk—pretty much all walk slow. And it's not because they are dull or out of shape or have asthma. It's on purpose. Deliberate. The by-product of years of apprenticeship under the easy yoke.

Not long ago I was in San Francisco with this older guy who is following Jesus in some really cool ways. We decided to take a stroll rather than sit for coffee. We had a few hours scheduled just to talk and with nowhere to be, but I found myself getting annoyed with his pace. It barely qualified as walking. He moseyed. Any time he had something extra deep to say, he'd fully stop, turn to me, and say it slooowly.

I found myself tapping my feet and feeling all agitated: *Come on, hurry up.*

Then I realized, *Where in the world am I trying to get to so fast? We literally have no place to be!*

Aah...

My point is, one of the best ways to slow down your overall pace of life is to *literally* slow down your body. Force yourself to move through the world at a relaxed pace.

All the New Yorkers are hating on me right now. In their defense they *do* have somewhere to be.

Recently T and I were out for a walk, and we got in a little tiff. Nothing heavy, just a minor skirmish.

She was walking too fast...

### ***16. Take a regular day alone for silence and solitude.***

I take a full day once a month to be alone. Again, not legalistic; sometimes I miss. But usually I wake up early. If the weather is good, I head out to Sauvie Island, a forty-minute drive up the river. In winter I'll book a room at a local Trappist abbey. Just me and the monks.

It's a slow, easy day, full of reading and praying and, yes, occasional napping.

It's Sabbath but a bit different; it's my time to center. Check my pulse. See if I'm actually living the way I want to live, in line with my convictions. I look back over the previous month; check the schedule for the month ahead. Pull out my life plan and annual goals; track my progress. Journal the ways I sense God coming to me with his invitations.

I absolutely cannot express how much the practice of a monthly day of silence and solitude is formative for my person.

Yes, I'm an introvert; I get most people aren't.

Yes, I'm a pastor; I have semi-flexible hours—I get that.

But I think it's wise for all personality types and far more doable than most people realize.

I wish more people did this. I wish young moms did this while dads watched the kids for one Saturday a month (and vice versa). I wish



college kids did this to keep from getting sucked into the insanity of university life where mental illness is at epidemic levels. I wish businesspeople did this to make sure the balance sheet of their lives looked even better than the one at their company. I wish creative, spontaneous, high P on Myers-Briggs, anti-schedule people did this to keep their beautiful, precious, short lives from wasting years on ephemeral distractions.

I wish you did this.

You can.

### ***17. Take up journaling.***

I don't journal a lot, just enough to keep focused and justify a Moleskine on my desk. Bare minimum, at my monthly silence and solitude day, I write up any key developments from that month, any dreams, prophetic words, or senses of direction from the Holy Spirit.

This slow, cathartic act of writing your life down is grounding, a tether for the soul in the hurricane of the modern world.

If you don't like to write, keep a vlog or voice note journal. Or just sit and process your life with God. The point is to slow down long enough to observe your life from the outside.

As the Greek once said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>15</sup>

### ***18. Experiment with mindfulness and meditation.***

Again, mindfulness is just silence and solitude for a secular society. It's like prayer, minus the best part.

And there are forms of Jesus mindfulness from the contemplative tradition.<sup>16</sup> On days when I can't focus and my imagination is running naked all over the place (which, unfortunately, is common for me), I

take a few minutes and just focus on my breathing. Very basic. I “watch” my breath go in and out.

Then I start to imagine myself breathing in the Holy Spirit and breathing out all the agitation of the day. I turn my breathing into a prayer, inhaling the fruit of the Spirit, one at a time...

Breathe in love, breathe out the anger...

Breathe in joy, breathe out the sadness and pain...

Breathe in peace, breathe out the anxiety and uncertainty of tomorrow...

Breathe in patience, breathe out the hurry of my life...

Even better than practicing mindfulness is the next step into meditation, another ancient Christian word that’s been co-opted by the New Age renaissance. But don’t think namaste; think Psalm 1: “Blessed is the one...who meditates on his law day and night.” In meditation of the Hebrew/Jesus variety, you don’t just empty your mind (of the noise, chaos, anxiety, etc.), but you *fill* your mind with Scripture, with truth, with the voice of the Holy Spirit.

I can’t put into words what meditation does for my soul. Tim Keller, however, can:

Persons who meditate become people of substance who have thought things out and have deep convictions, who can explain difficult concepts in simple language, and who have good reasons behind everything they do. Many people do not meditate. They skim everything, picking and choosing on impulse, having no thought-out reasons for their behavior. Following whims, they live shallow lives.<sup>17</sup>

In a cultural moment of shallow, mindfulness and meditation are a step toward the deep waters.

### ***19. If you can, take long vacations.***

I've noticed a lot of people don't take long vacations anymore. More like weekend getaways. Head down to LA for a few days. Go to the beach for a weekend. Road-trip to a concert.

This can be a great form of play and a break from routine, which is good and necessary, but often we return home even more tired than before our break. In my experience it takes quite a while to actually slow down long enough to reach a deep place of soul rest.

A recent study documented that only 14 percent of Americans take vacations that last longer than two weeks, and a whopping 37 percent of us take fewer than seven vacation days a year.<sup>18</sup> As the vacations of the middle class become busier and more activity based, coming back from our too-short vacations exhausted is becoming the new normal.

So, most years I save a few vacation days for random things—a wedding, anniversary getaway, that house project. But I take most of it in one long break. People think I'm crazy. *Where were you?* I think I'm onto something.

But this could be just my job rhythms and the need for a break from teaching. A recent study from Finland's University of Tampere found that happiness levels peak on day eight of vacation and then hit a plateau.<sup>19</sup> The researchers recommended we take off one week every quarter (for those with the luxury of four weeks paid vacation time).

Under the Torah, Israel had three feasts a year set aside as a weeklong Sabbath. Zero work allowed, just an extended Sabbath of rest and worship. Usually, the weeklong festival was actually eight

days, due to a Sabbath on the front or back end. Ancient wisdom now “proved” by modern science?

I fully get that for many of you this isn't an option, especially for those suffering under the weight of poverty or injustice or just starting out in your career. My encouragement is simply that you take *as long* a vacation as you can, *as often* as you can. Our staff has a rule of life that we sign as part of our employment contracts; on it we literally commit to take all our vacation days each year. I'd encourage you to consider the same.

Summer vacation is one of the most important spiritual disciplines in my life. Yes, that *is* a spiritual discipline. Jesus and most of the great spiritual masters of the Bible regularly went away for weeks at a time, into the eremos. My eremos just has three little kids running around and a stack of novels.

I vote we turn *summer* into a verb again.

## ***20. Cook your own food. And eat in.***

We eat in a lot. Tammy and I have a weekly date night, but we rarely eat out as a family. I pack a lunch for work, and our kids just stare at the school cafeteria pizza with existential longing. Most nights we're home. We eat a plant-based, whole-food diet, which means we have to cook a lot of it from scratch. We cook a lot of the same meals to keep things easy. Simplicity in all things.

Fast food is fast, not food. Real food takes time. We're okay with that.

The anchor point for our family's life is the table. We tell stories from the day, highs, lows. Tammy and I ask questions to keep the conversation from devolving into grade-school humor. Welcome neighbors and community. Teach manners as a form of love for neighbor.

After dinner I usually read a chapter from the Bible as we sit around the table. Or just a “proverb of the day.”

Recently, we started a new tradition where I introduce a vocabulary word. Each kid tries to use it correctly in a sentence, and the ones who do get a chocolate chip (I’m feeling so much judgment right now...).

This, last night, from Jude:

The thing about most homework is, it’s *perfunctory*.

But Moses, our eight-year-old, budding creative, has another tack: he makes up a story. Usually it’s long, complex, bizarre, and hilarious, and he doesn’t use the vocab word until the *last* sentence. By the end of his drama, the other four of us are usually dying with laughter.

Who does that?

Moses, that’s who.

These are the moments that make a family a *family*. And some of the best of them happen around a table.

## **The heart**

This chapter was so fun to write, but please don’t misread the tone. I’m smiling right now, not glaring. None of this is coming from a high-strung, uptight, religious-guilt-trip kind of heart posture. I promise. Every single rule here is life giving for me. Even fun.

These are just ideas. They might not be for you. That’s cool. Come up with your own list. But come up with a list. Then do it.

There’s more to life than an increase in speed. Life is right under our noses, waiting to be enjoyed.

We must ruthlessly eliminate hurry, and that's best done gamefully.