



December 20, 2023
A Note from Pastor April

Dear Friends,

When it comes to life's important lessons, I usually have to learn them the hard way.

I've known for some time that my body, my heart, and my spirit were needing a season to SLOW DOWN. (Note: One of my Letters of Encouragement in early 2023 was about this very thing!)

Carrie Newcomer has a beautiful lyric in one of her songs that best describes where I was:

"I've been traveling faster than my soul can go."

My word for 2023 was LISTEN.

I had a four-month renewal leave planned. After learning that I was pre-diabetic, I was learning new ways of honoring my body through drastically reducing my sugar intake. I was starting to work a little further ahead with my planning and preparation. Surely, this would be the year when I could finally slow down and let my soul catch up.

Just before my renewal leave arrived, I caught some kind of summer chest cold. I was congested, coughing, and more than a little annoyed to be losing my voice during my week as the storyteller at VBS.

I had so much to do before my leave began.

Slowing down would have to wait.

As I was rushing out of my house one morning during VBS week, I backed up so quickly I smashed the side mirror of my car against the garage.

A couple of days later, in another rush, I fell down the stairs.

On the first day of my leave, I was rushing through a workout and dropped a weight on my left middle finger, shattering several small bones on the tip.

I was scheduled to fly to Portland the next day.

As I was sitting in the doctor's office waiting for my X-ray, I had to laugh.



Is it possible that God had been trying to get my attention?

SLOWING DOWN was easier said than done.

I was still learning these lessons eight weeks into my renewal leave. The cough was still lingering. Four days into my time of walking the Camino in Spain, it got bad enough that I went to see an Urgent Care doc and decided to finish walking a day earlier than expected. With my new highly-effective steroid inhaler in hand, I parted company with my friend and headed to the beautiful walled city of Avila for a time of solitude and rest.



For the next five days, I slept close to 14 hours a day. I ventured out for only a few hours a day to see the sacred sites of the beloved St. Teresa of Avila, and then I would go back and sleep some more. I moved very slowly. I used the inhaler.

Slowly but surely... my body started to recover.

In the quiet of that hotel room, my body and soul and heart began to catch up to one another.

Finally, I was LISTENING to ALL of me. I was VALUING ALL of me. I was giving myself the SPACE I had needed all along.



The second half of my leave felt remarkably different.

Even the parts that included travel were slower and gentler. The cough was gone. I felt like I could BREATHE again — both physically and spiritually. I felt like the pace of life was allowing me to move at a speed where my body, soul, and heart could keep up.

Within this space, I was amazed at how much more energy, creativity, and joy I was experiencing.

This week especially, we are reminded that moving at a SLOWER PACE is also the way God chooses to work in the world.

The long-awaited Messiah came quietly into a stable, born to an audience of animals and shepherds. It would be decades before he would begin his ministry and reveal to the world the incarnational love of God. Even after Jesus's death and resurrection, it took centuries before the good news of God's love for all people began to spread to the farthest corners of the world.

God doesn't seem to be in a hurry.

Could the SLOWING DOWN help us learn to trust in the pace of God, content to wait for things to unfold in due time?

When I returned to work in November, I was determined not to simply return to old patterns. I knew I needed to move at a slower pace than I had before.

"How's that going?" one of my friends asked me this week.

Well, I'll be honest. I'm still working on it.

I'm trying to listen to my body and create lots of room in my calendar.

I'm working to keep lots of space for the creative energy that this season seems to have generated.

I'm spending more time in prayer and quiet just trying to listen to God and to myself.

And I'm slower than ever to respond to emails and texts. (Sometimes I'm missing them all together — if that's you, by the way, don't feel bad about giving me another nudge.)

I'm finding that some days I am still completely exhausted and spent.

It's a work in progress.

At the end of this year of LISTENING, I can't say that I've found any magic formula or approach that will make life slower.

But I have learned a lot about what it means to PAY ATTENTION. (As it turns out, my BODY is super smart, and she has a LOT to teach me in this area!)

I've learned a lot about offering myself and others a lot of GRACE. (I've had 46 years of practice moving at a relentless pace. Learning how to slow down will take me longer than one year!)



AND I'm more aware of how IMPORTANT it is that we keep working to create the SPACE we all need to slow the pace. For the healing of our bodies, hearts, and souls. For our ability to listen to the slow movement of God in us and all around us. And for the building of communities and organizations that are healthy, whole, and life-giving.

What could become possible if we were collectively moving at the speed of our souls?

At HUMC this Christmas, we're trying to give ourselves a little more room for all of that.

Instead of a letter next week, we'll send a simple poem.

The office will be closed next week.

Most of us staff will be resting and slowing down.

I hope there will be space for you to do the same — space to change the pace and listen to what is most important and needed.

Sending so much love to all of you in this season.

I'm grateful to be on the journey with all of you.

Pastor April



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