

## The Blessed Rest of Self-Forgetfulness

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### Today's Treasure

*Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger...*  
*James 1:19*

I especially enjoy breakfast out with Chuck because fresh from a night's sleep, our creative juices seem to flow and our conversation is energizing and refreshing. But this morning, the voice of the woman in the booth next to us broke our concentration the way a chirping cricket demands attention or a barking dog fills the quiet morning or once noticed, a dripping faucet must be turned off. She was talking when we sat down for breakfast and she was still talking 45 minutes later when we got up to leave. Her companion, another woman, responded to her monologue with a periodic nod of her head and "hmmm..." Mystery writer Margaret Miller once said, "Most conversations are simply monologues delivered in the presence of a witness."

That morning we witnessed a "monologue delivered in the presence of a witness". We learned about the numerous church events she had planned and executed, from the foods served, how they were presented and tasted, the place card designs, the meeting agendas, the people who attended the meetings, the color scheme on the place cards, and then there was the program and how the program looked and the heated conversation with another committee member and the way the other committee members don't do things the way she does, and....I get irritated just thinking about it! Her voice droned and droned and droned.

Chuck could barely restrain himself from asking her to take a breath and give us all a break from the constant, boring hum of her voice. I can typically ignore such an irritating person but this one burrowed under my skin. Then a strange thing happened. I began to review "conversations" where I was the main event, a conversation that in reality was a monologue in the presence of a witness. Why, oh why, do I talk too much and listen too little?

Author Carole Mayhall's journal entry included in her book, *Words that Hurt, Words that Heal*, gives me a clue to consider:

I did it again, Lord, And, I'm sorry. You have convicted me before about "name-dropping," "place-dropping," "knowledge-dropping." That wasn't the problem

this time, Lord. In sharing around the table with a small group of dear Christians, I realized afterward there was an inner desire to impress. Oh, I didn't say anything I didn't mean. We shared about You, Lord, and that was good. But somewhere in my being, instead of sharing from an overflowing heart, I seemed to be sharing out of a need to impress by my "overflowing heart." Forgive me, Lord! Help me to keep silent until You tell me to speak. (*Words That Hurt, Words That Heal*, page 78-79)

### LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

Try as I might to focus on others in my conversations rather than looking for opportunities to put self at the center I fail again and again. In their wonderful book, *Transformed: Life-Taker to Life-Giver*, Karen Hodge and Susan Hunt challenge me to recognize genuine transformation starts with the heart, a heart that is free because of submission to the Gospel. They quote Tim Keller's book, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*:

"Because the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less . . . [It] means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness. The blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings."

Ouch. Yet, also, an aha moment. Think of how much energy it takes to make sure the conversation always comes back to me. There is freedom in submission to the Gospel. God gave us two ears and one mouth for a purpose - so we will listen twice as much as we speak. The Bible says:

*When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.  
Proverbs 10:19*

The "great philosopher", Will Rogers exhorted, "Never miss a good chance to shut up." On that note, I will.

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