

When someone asks me how I am—I'm as likely as not to say, "Busy!"
As if being busy is a virtue and something to be sought after
I suppose it comes from not wanting to be considered lazy
Truth is that I'm not really that busy
I'm not so busy I can't take a break or take time to visit with someone
This job offers me incredible flexibility for which I'm grateful
Mostly I think it is a habit—and not a good one

On the other hand, we Americans do pride ourselves in being busy
We readily chock it up to the complex society in which we live
Sometimes we're nostalgic about the "good old days" and their simplicity
Yet we rarely really want to live without our modern amenities and technology
Besides—I think they really worked harder than we do today
Beyond the multitude of things we are doing—there is the list of things we think we "should" do
It is easy to get overwhelmed and stymied by the never ending list stretching before us

We are apt to think the cause of this great busyness is external and environmental
But Thomas Kelly suggests that it is really that we are not skilled at the inner life
And this lack of skill or comfort with the inner life is the real root of our problem
He goes on to talk about the lack of integration of our inner lives
He suggests that we live compartmentalized lives—trying to be several selves at once
Rather than a single self...
We are a whole committee of selves...
Kelly lists the civic self, the parental self, the financial self, the religious self,
the society self, the professional self, the literary self
And each self is an individualist that doesn't cooperate easily with the others

In addition to that I would say there is the body self, the mind self, the emotions self, spirit self
Plus, the little child self, the adult self, and the parent self

The body self is frequently ignored—and made to persevere until it is screaming in protest
I see people whose body is screaming at them to retire—determined to keep working
Or we tell the little child self to be quiet and get to work when we really need to play!
No wonder the emotional self has a melt-down—how else will it ever be heard
In reality we are not careful with our inner beings and easily run rough shod over them

We too easily dismiss the quieter voices and take count of the most votes in any decision
Even as Quakers we fall into this human trap, leaving" the minority voices disgruntled
Clearly this is no way to live

We get hints of better ways... We see others that seem to be less scattered... occasionally we do better
So, we know it doesn't have to be this way—but some of us struggle to get to that better space

"Life is meant to be lived from a Center, a divine Center." Thomas Kelly, *Testament of Devotion*, p 116
This is at the heart of Quakerism
It is possible to live this centered life—for all of us
This isn't some way of living reserved for the blessed few
No, as Quakers, we truly believe, that this same Divine Presence is available to every one

And that we can all live in the full power and transforming grace of God's peace
We can be fully integrated—all inner voices working together in concert
We can live life from this Center

Kelly uses the example of John Woolman as one who lived according to his divine Center
He resolved to order his outward affairs in such a way that he was attentive to God's voice
He is known for his work against slavery
But we've learned that his first commitment was to live in such a manner
That everything he did was consistent with his commitment to follow God
His work against slavery was one of those—a calling for Woolman
But everything was to be lived from that Center
He simplified his life based on that Center and focused everything around the Center
Everything he did came back to this Diving guidance which he followed
He allowed the nudges and whispers of God's direction to be primary voices
His meant not letting his business get outsized for what he was to do
Too many customers and they were sent to other businesses nearby
He simplified his outward life on the bases of an inward integration
All his inner voices working together in concert with the Divine Concertmaster
Woolman yielded to the Center and his life became simple and focused
His many selves were integrated into one true self
Whose whole aim was humbly walking in the presence, guidance and will of God

It was as if Woolman's inner being was organized like a Quaker Meeting
The clerk of his inner being gathered all of Woolman—his inner selves, inner callings and nudges
His work to be done, his external pressures and all that was on his plate
It's all gathered and held in the Presence of God—Listening for the Sense of the Meeting
Listening for Way Forward
Listening for those things that are not his to do
Listening to what rises as things that must receive his attention

What a powerful way for all of us to orient our lives
Rather than shoving a voice aside because we don't have time—invite that voice to speak
When the inner child asks to play, we listen
When the body says I'm exhausted, we listen
We take all those voices and our "to do list" into the Meeting and Listen to God
What is mine to do in this moment? Today? What obligations are not truly mine?
I'm often surprised at the shifts that happen in this Listening
Some things rise and others fall away
It is such a helpful reorientation to what/who I think I'm about

At the core of this is an overwhelming desire to be in the Presence of God—to live life with God
To love God and to be loved by God in my inner being
When asked about the greatest commandment, *Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' Mark 12:29-30 NRSV*
To love God in this way is to bring all members of our inner community to the table
Love God with our full selves—build your life on the bedrock—rooted and grounded in God's love

But then reality settles in and we get busy—can I hold this sense of doing life with God?

This is where Brother Lawrence is helpful—Practicing the Presence of God

He talks about doing his chores with God—washing dishes, whatever is done with God

“This time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.” Brother Lawrence

We take God with us everywhere, into every moment, every conversation, every duty, etc.

Charlie Parks had an epiphany when he realized God would clean toilets with him!

This is entirely different from adding God and church on top of our already busy lives

It is making God central to everything we are—and living out of that center

In so doing, everything finds itself reoriented and shifted in relationship to the Center

We can be so pulled to do the second commandment of loving other people that this becomes priority

First commandment is to love God

Second commandment: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* Mark 12:31

I had an epiphany this week

If we do the first well—we will do the second—as God's love spills over in us

It is, then, wisdom to put our focus on the first commandment to love God

It is from this Center of living with God and loving God—that all else flows

Here is where our purposes in life are formed and shaped

Here is where the knowings come

Life changes and is transformed simply because of living in this central place with God

Life from the Center is a heaven-directed life in concert with everyone else living this way

God is at work in this world, reconciling the world to God—and we're part of the big picture

Life from the Center is a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It takes no time, but it occupies all our time. And it makes our life programs new and overcoming. We need not get frantic. [God] is at the helm. And when our little day is done we lie down quietly in peace, for all is well. Thomas Kelly, Testament of Devotion, p. 124.