



Waiting for 'real life' to begin

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I've been thinking about Howard Thurman's warning that "to postpone living significantly in the present is a serious blunder." What does it mean to "postpone living," whether significantly or insignificantly? Each morning that I'm nudged out of sleep, aren't I living? Each moment I'm given to breathe and laugh and wonder and cry and love, isn't each of these the present moment, regardless of the attention I bring to it or fail to bring to it? What does it mean to "postpone living significantly in the present"?

The truth is, I don't have to 'understand' it for my inward being to know I tend to do this. I dwell in places of perceived failures/successes (who knows which is which?) of the past or the future more than the joys and troubles of today. The Now sounds like a less complicated, more refreshing place to be, a simpler place where it's easier to breathe, a place of new beginnings. I imagine it to be a wonderful realm, and maybe I'll get there ... some day. But a few things are demanding my attention first. Soon, when things are in order, I'll spend some quality time there. Later this week maybe. Next month for sure, or at least by summer. And in the meantime, millions of moments float down the river, while I blunder along, slogging through the past and the future, lands of the living dead.

I notice I tend to put off other pleasant excursions as well. Like visiting the Grand Canyon or Crater Lake or the Everglades or any number of other natural wonders that I really do intend to see ... some day. Or much more accessible pleasures like spending an entire day lying on the couch with my CD collection, listening to symphonies and Johnny Cash and Garrison Keillor, or lying belly down in new grass just to smell life at worm level, or driving with no particular destination in mind and exploring whatever

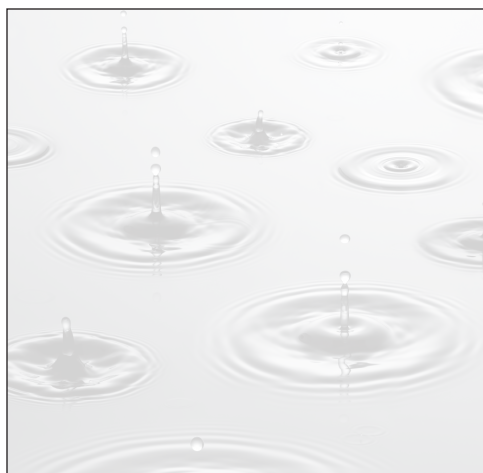
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ordinary, quirky towns crop up along the way—so many ridiculously simple pleasures waiting to be enjoyed. Maybe I'm reluctant to experience them because I enjoy looking forward to them. Nibbling on familiar fears and excitements of the past and the future takes the edge off my hunger for the Now; anticipation of the feast replaces the feast.

Or could it be that I just need to get some things in order first? Once I'm living significantly in the present, I might not be very interested in organizing files and photos and tax papers, or cleaning out drawers and cupboards and closets, regardless of how much these things need to be done. So first let me answer this stack of letters and return these phone calls and emails and get my calendar and address book up-to-date and checks written and direct deposit and other features activated on my bank account and the recycling sorted and the unworn clothes taken to Goodwill and the worn clothes laundered and new filing systems and containers purchased . . . and maybe I should sign up for a retreat on the theme, just to get me started. THEN I'll be ready.

Could this be the blunder? To use large chunks of this precious moment trying to prepare for the Now rather than diving in, ready or not, and letting the Now prepare me? There will always be more to do, more to understand, more to relinquish. There will always be something interrupting my desire to be here now. So until I learn to bow reverently to the interruption itself as the gift of the moment, I'll be forever waiting for my Real Life to begin. Especially on the way to the cross—that divine interruption—I want to practice saying a courageous yes to whatever comes in this moment, seeing the interruptions not as barriers to be endured but as signposts marking the way to what's Real.

Each dark night of prayer, each simple meal with friends, each betrayal, each fragile promise—I want to be in them all, moment by moment by moment, like Jesus, discovering the path by walking it. Not some day. Now.



Everywhere

God is indeed everywhere—
in the darkness as well as
in light, in the ordinary life lived with
extraordinary consciousness, in the
sacred center of a creation that is secular
to its marrow. It is in the separation of life
into categories of the holy and the unholy,
the spiritual and the material, the earthly
and the heavenly that the human soul gets
divided as well.

— Joan Chittister

Source: "Living in the Breath of the Spirit,"
collected in *In My Own Words*

