

We've been building a new meetinghouse garage, which has been an interesting experience. I'd never been personally involved with a construction project. We'd had some work done at our house a few years ago, but after the first couple of days, the carpenters made me leave. So my experience with building was to show up with duffel bags full of money, give it to the workers, go away, then come back a week later with more money.

So it's been interesting watching this garage get built from the ground up. But I've been a bit impatient. Last Saturday, after we had framed the walls—notice my casual use of carpentry lingo—after we had framed the walls, I approached Tim Anderson, who's been helping us, and asked, "Can I start putting on the siding?" I thought that might hurry things along and make the garage look like a garage.

Tim said, "No, first we have to put OSB sheeting on the walls."

I was trying to figure out what OSB meant, when the others began nailing these sheets of wood to the walls.

That looked too much like work, so I sat in the shade and watched and drank all our water.

They finished with that, then they put on the roof trusses, and nailed OSB sheathing to the roof.

I asked Tim, “Can I put the siding on now?”

He said, “No, first we have to put on the soffits and get that all square.”

I pointed out the corners of the building were already square, and that maybe we could save time by putting on the siding vertically instead of horizontally.

Tim sent me away to get more money, and when I came back, they were done.

But it’s been a valuable experience, if only because it reminded me of my tendency to want to rush through some experiences so I can get to another experience I think might be more pleasant.

When Joan and I were first married, I wanted to have children immediately. But Joan thought it would be wiser to wait until I was through college and graduate school so we could devote more time and attention to being parents. For the next eight years, all I could think about was being done with school so we could start our family. As I reflect back on it, school was a wonderful opportunity, but one I didn’t take full advantage of because I was too busy wanting to be at the next place in my life.

I don't think this is uncommon, particularly with people like us, who tend to be goal-oriented. We have a goal in mind, and we rush headlong toward it.

But the problem with hurrying through one experience to get to another, more pleasant, experience is this—we miss what that first experience has to teach us. Perhaps there was something in that experience we needed to learn, but we rushed through it so quickly, or skipped over it altogether, and we missed a lesson we needed to learn. Sometimes we do this because we're in a hurry, and sometimes we rush through an experience because we think it will be unpleasant and we want to avoid it.

I have talked about this recently, and I want to assure you I won't be talking about this all the time, but I'm still reflecting on it. When Joan's mother, Ruby, was dying, and we knew she wasn't going to make it, I wanted the doctor to give her a high dose of morphine to speed her death. I didn't see any benefit in letting her linger. So I pulled the doctor aside and suggested he hurry her death along. He said, "You know, she's comfortable. Let's just let her go at her own pace."

But the problem was that I wasn't comfortable, and I wanted to hurry through that experience, to get to another experience with which I am more comfortable—preparing funerals and consoling people.

I know how to help people after a loved one dies. I even find that meaningful. But sitting with someone while they die, that's another matter. I can do it, but it doesn't come easily or naturally to me. It's difficult. It's work.

But the doctor said, "We can't hurry this." What that did was give Ruby's children the opportunity to care for her the way she had once cared for them. They had to attend to her bodily needs and functions. And while Ruby wasn't always fully aware, she was aware of their care on some level and it seemed to be very comforting and reassuring to her, and comforting and reassuring to her adult children. In fact, I believe the experience of helping their mother as she died, drew Joan and her siblings together in a very powerful, meaningful way and now they are much closer.

So we need to be careful not to hurry through those experiences that might end up blessing us or blessing someone else, just because we think someplace down the road might be better.

I love reading the gospel reading accounts of Jesus' life—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Often, what is most telling about those stories are the little asides that are never the main point of a story, but nevertheless give us insight into the character of Jesus.

One of those hints is how often Jesus would end up doing something very significant while on his way to do something else. It's startling how often a healing story begins with a sentence like this, "While he was going toward..." or "As they were on the road..." or "While he was teaching..." There was this constant pattern of interruption in Jesus' life. It would have driven me crazy. I would have been calculating my arrival at my goal, always checking my watch, someone would have stopped me to do something else, and I would have become angry and impatient. But because Jesus was open to what that experience might teach him, he would stop. And always to great benefit.

We've been talking these past few weeks about the qualities of the spiritual life. Two Sundays ago, I suggested *gratitude* was an important component of spirituality. Last week, I said *reflection*, asking ourselves "What did I learn?" was an important element of the spiritual life. This week, I lift up the virtue of *spiritual pacing*—being careful not to hurry through one experience so you can get on to something else you think might be more pleasant. For those interruptions, those other steps we have to take, are often, in retrospect, more important and beneficial than we ever imagined.

For God speaks to us in places, in people, in situations we least expect.