

The
Ruthless
Elimination
of
~~Hurry~~

Where were you when you first heard about the great shutdown of 2020?

I was at HPUMC, leaving a meeting where our church leadership had just decided to officially close the building to in-person worship for the first time in over 100 years. I remember looking forward to working from home. I foolishly believed it would be easier. Relaxing at home, in my PJs, a cup of coffee in hand and the TV on in the background...Sounds like a dream!

But that was *not* my experience. And my guess is that may be true for you, too.

Hurry is the one word that best describes my life during the pandemic. There were some weeks when I worked 60-70 hours for the church on top of a part-time job, and my seminary coursework. I also have a toddler, a husband, a cat, and a house. My life was (and still is) filled with hurry.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, tired, burned out, frantic, hurried, this book is for you!

Let me offer a word of caution: A book like this is really easy to pick up, read from cover-to-cover (nodding with conviction), and then set it down, to never think about it again. The temptation is real, but doing that won't change your life.

This is a book that needs to be practiced. That's why we've created this companion guide. Each week, you'll find a section to read, questions to reflect upon, and a practice to pick up.

You don't have to surrender to hurry. Neither do I. So, will you join me in breaking free? You never know, it might just change your life!

Alex Johnston
Director of Content

P.S. Exercises from this guide were recommended in the "How to Unhurry Workbook" by John Mark Comer. There are tons of other great resources and exercises available if you're interested, so check it out here!

Hurry:
The Great Enemy
of Spiritual Life



*If the devil can't make us **bad**,
he'll make us **busy**.*

– Corrie Ten Boom



READ

Part one and part two of “The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry.”

The greatest enemy when it comes to our spiritual life today is...

How would you finish that statement?

Maybe you're thinking of a political ideology. Maybe what comes to mind is a specific person or group of people. Is it a particular worldview or group of Christians you think have the wrong idea about God and what it means to be a Christian? Is it Satan?

Not many people would say *hurry*. **But what if hurry is the real enemy of spiritual life?** That's the idea at the heart of this book. John Mark Comer says it best when he writes, “Love, joy, and peace are at the heart of all Jesus is trying to grow in the soil of our life. And all three are incompatible with hurry.”

REFLECT

1. Our culture values busy-ness; if you're busy, then you must be important or valuable. How has the first part of this book challenged that mindset for you?

2. John Mark shares a story about a conversation between megachurch pastor John Ortberg and Dallas Willard, a Christian teacher and philosopher. During this conversation, Ortberg asks what he must do to become the person he wants to be. Willard responds with the line that sparked the title of this book, **“You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”** What do you think he meant by this? Why would hurry be a threat to our spiritual lives?

3. John Mark makes the point that hurry and love are incompatible. Do you think that's true? Do you notice a difference in how you treat people when you are busy, distracted, or rushed?

4. John Mark Comer writes about the idea that our hurried lifestyle is often an attempt to either *run* from something (wounds, trauma, insecurity) or *toward* something (experiences, a promotion). Which do you think is true for you? Why is that?

5. Revisit John Mark's 10 symptoms of hurry sickness on pp. 48-51. Which of these resonate with you? Would you like to feel differently? Are you willing to try something new?

PRACTICE

#1 Screen Time Inventory

Open your phone and check your screen time.
Not sure how? [Read here.](#)

- How many hours are on your phone each day?
- Which apps do you use most frequently? Why?
- Do you have any digital “waste” (phone usage that is not necessary or valuable)?
- What *could* you be doing with that time that would leave you more satisfied?
- How can you redirect some of the unnecessary screen time toward other, more worthy endeavors?

Set a goal for the week ahead. It can be a goal around your total minutes, your phone pickups, time spent on a particular app—the point is to decrease the attention you devote to your screen in order to increase the attention you give to those around you, and to your own soul.

#2 Burnout Inventory

Burnout is that moment when we've had enough. It's physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion brought on by periods of prolonged stress.

Whether you're working a fast-paced job, you're a stay-at-home parent chasing kids around all day, or facing difficult circumstances in your family or marriage, burnout is real and it can have a profound impact on your daily life.

If every day feels like a slog, you're too exhausted to do anything, or you feel like nothing you do matters, you may be getting crispy.

If you're not quite sure where you stand, take the Burnout Self-Assessment below and then work through the reflection questions that follow either alone or with someone you trust.

Questions	Not At All (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Very Often (5)
I feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy.					
I have negative thoughts about my job.					
I am harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve.					
I am easily irritated by small problems, or by my co-workers.					
I feel misunderstood or unappreciated by my co-workers.					
I feel that I have no one to talk to.					
I feel that I am achieving less than I should.					
I feel under an unpleasant level of pressure to succeed.					
I feel that I am not getting what I want out of my job.					
I feel that I am in the wrong organization or profession.					
I am frustrated with parts of my job.					
I feel that organizational politics or bureaucracy frustrate my ability to do a good job.					
I feel that there is more work to do than I practically have the ability to do.					
I feel that I do not have time to do many of the things that are important to doing a good quality job.					
I find that I do not have time to plan as much as I want to.					
Total					

Score interpretations (No matter your score, pay attention to areas you ranked a 5)

15-18: No sign of burnout.

60-75: Very severe risk of burnout.

19-32: Little sign of burnout.

33-49: At risk of burnout.

50-59: Severe risk of burnout.

Reflect on the following questions after you've completed your burnout assessment.

1. Did your assessment results surprise you? Why or why not?

2. If you scored high on the burnout spectrum, what are some practical things you can do this week to create space to breathe and recover?

3. If you scored either in the low or mid-range in terms of burnout, what are some signs you can watch for to make sure that you're not crossing over into dangerous territory?



The First Practice: Silence and Solitude



*The noise of the modern world makes us
deaf to the voice of God, drowning out the
one input **we most need.***

– John Mark Comer

READ

Chapters titled “Intermission” and “Silence and Solitude.”

This may be the most radical of all the four disciplines. What does silence and solitude even mean, *really*? Most of my life is characterized by noise. In the rare moments there is silence, I quickly fill it with background music, the news, or YouTube on autoplay.

So, what does it mean to *practice* silence and solitude?

Take this time to work through the questions below in a *quiet* place on your own. Keep in mind that John Mark’s definition of this practice is **“intentional time in the quiet to be alone with God, and our own soul.”**

Consider how you might incorporate silence and solitude as part of your weekly or — if you dare — *daily* rhythm.

REFLECT

1. John Mark tells the story in Mark 6, where the disciples were dead tired after a few weeks of kingdom work, so tired they didn't have a chance to eat. Jesus invites them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Imagine Jesus is directing that invitation to *you*. How would you respond?
2. What is your first response when you're alone, in a quiet place, or waiting somewhere? What would it look like to welcome the quiet?
3. John Mark writes about the difference between *external* noise and *internal* noise. When the external noise calms down, what is the internal noise like in your head? How can you quiet the volume? When the external *and* internal noise in your life is silenced, what happens to you?
4. Read the signs and symptoms of a life without solitude (pg. 137-139). Which ones do you resonate with most? John Mark presents us with option A and option B. Which one do you want more? Are you willing to go for it?

PRACTICE

Look at your calendar for the week ahead.

Carve out “intentional time in the quiet to be alone with God, and your own soul.” It can be 15 minutes. It can be an hour. Start where you’re comfortable. Practice The First 15. Read your Bible. Pray. Or just sit in silence. Whatever feels right to help quiet the noise and connect with God.

If structure helps you, below is an exercise you can try from “How to Unhurry.”

Exercise:

Focus on our breathing to calm our mind, and let it “descend into the heart” in God.

1. Put away your phone and any other distractions, settle into your time/place, and get comfortable. You may want to take a short walk first, light a candle, or stretch as a way of easing your soul into a new mode.

2. Watch your breathing.

Sit in an upright but relaxed position.

Close your eyes.

Take slow, deep breaths.

- Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
- As you inhale, breathe all the way in until your stomach distends (this fills your brain with clean, clear oxygen).
- As you exhale, shape your lips like you're breathing out through a straw, and push all the air out with your stomach muscles (getting all the carbon dioxide and toxins out of your system).

Feel the sensations in your body – stress, heart rate, tightness, calmness, pain, lightness, etc. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and it's a good gift. By becoming present in our body, we become present in the moment, and eventually, in God Himself.

Just “watch” your breath enter and exit your body. Pay attention to it and nothing else.

Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do's, and distractions. That's okay. It's used to constant chatter, not stillness. Don't judge yourself, feel like a failure, or give up. Just let each thought go as quickly as it comes. When you notice your mind starting to wander, just re-center with a quick prayer, like, “Father” or “Jesus” or “Peace” or the ancient, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner,” and come back to your breathing.

Let the Spirit generate from deep within you a compassionate heart toward yourself and each thought that you gently release.

3. Pray.

This isn't new age, hypnosis, or magic; it's just a way of resting in God's love, being present to him, slowing down to let Jesus set the pace and agenda of our day.

Once you settle into a rhythm, begin to turn each breath into a prayer. One breath at a time, imagine yourself breathing out:

- Anger
- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Despair
- Fear
- The Need To Control
- Discontentment

And then imagine yourself breathing in its opposite:

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Hope
- Trust
- Detachment
- Contentment

4. Abide.

Before you end this exercise, spend a little while just “abiding in the vine;” simply sit in loving attention on God. Watch God watching you in compassionate love. This is the core of all transformation into Christlikeness. Through resting under God’s loving attention toward us by the Spirit, we are transformed.

As St. John of the Cross once said, “What we need most in order to make progress is to be silent before this great God... for the language he best hears is silent love.”

Note: In the beginning, just 2-3 minutes of this is a win, and 10 minutes is a home run. Like many practices, at first you may well feel awkward or even anxious, but give it time. It will likely come to feel deeply enjoyable in time.



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The Second Practice: Sabbath



“Sabbath is the holy time where we feast, play, dance, have sex, sing, pray, laugh, tell stories, read, paint, walk and watch creation in its fullness. Few people are willing to enter the Sabbath and sanctify it, to make it holy, because a day full of delight and joy is more than most people can bear in a lifetime, let alone a week.”

– Dan Allender, Sabbath

READ

The Chapter titled, “Sabbath.”

Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word “to stop.” It’s a day dedicated to ceasing all activity, all worry, all anxiety about what comes next, and simply rest.

When was the last time you practiced a full day of rest? (When was the last time you felt *rested*?)

We are not robots built to run 24/7, and when we try to, we quickly forget the One who is actually running the show.

The Sabbath is a day designed to help you rest, and it’s also a day designed to help you remember: to remember that God has provided for you, that God is with you, and maybe most importantly, that God doesn’t live in *your world*; you live in God’s world.

It’s a day to shift perspective.

And when we remember that, “all we do is *rest* and *worship*.”

REFLECT

1. Think back to a time you felt deep satisfaction. What did it feel like? What was it that made you feel satisfied? What typically leaves you feeling *unsatisfied*?
2. Re-read page 146. What does it mean to be satisfied in God? What would it look like to “put all our other desires in their proper place *below* God?”
3. When you imagine “observing” the Sabbath, taking a full day to stop and rest, what scares you? What makes it seem difficult or impossible to pull off?
4. In section two, “Sabbath as Resistance,” John Mark argues that slavery isn't dead in the United States, it just looks different. Our nation is built on the backs of the poor. Sabbath is a way of resistance, reminding us we are more than producers and purchasers. What reaction did you have in this section?
5. John Mark describes what the Sabbath looks like to his family. What could Sabbath look like for you?

PRACTICE

We've selected two exercises from "How to Unhurry" for you to play with.

The first is for those who aren't ready to dedicate an entire day to the kind of Sabbath explored in the book, but are ready to experience rest from the digital vortex.

The second is for those who are willing to see what the Sabbath life can truly look like! It involves a full 24-hour period dedicated to rest and worship.

Exercise #1: The Digital Detox

Digital addiction is real! For many, the idea of turning off all your devices for a full day sounds terrifying. Some people even label it irresponsible or lazy. But there are so many benefits to a weekly digital detox, not the least of which is an increased capacity to encounter God and one another in rest.

1. Make a plan.

I recommend you turn your devices entirely off for a full day. But you may decide to simply limit your time, or avoid all social media, but still call your mom or FaceTime a friend in another city. If so, I still recommend you put your devices away for the unallotted times.

2. Make any social plans ahead of time.

Include this in your preparation day. Schedule times for coffee, brunch, or your picnic at the park with family or friends, so you can stay offline as much as you want.

3. Put your devices away.

Whether you completely power off all devices or just choose to limit your time, either way, put them away — in a box, drawer, or closet. Out of sight, out of mind.

4. Spend an entire day in rest and worship.

Note: If you think this is legalistic or far too impractical, I simply encourage you to try it for a few weeks. Ideally, try it for a full month, as it takes a while to get over the dopamine addiction we have to technology. If after a month, you don't feel a marked increase in love, joy, and peace in your emotional health and spiritual life, feel free to try something else.

Exercise #2: Going a Little Deeper. The 24-Hour Sabbath.

1. Mark out a 24-hour time period (or as close as you can) to rest and worship.

There are three common variations of this practice:

- **The traditional Sabbath:** from sundown Friday night to the same time Saturday late afternoon. This works well for people who are especially busy on Sundays with church activities or other events.
- **The Lord's Day Sabbath:** from waking on Sunday morning (or ideally upon going to bed Saturday night) through Sunday evening. This works best for most people as Sunday is the calmest day in most cities and it's likely you already set aside time to worship with your community.
- **The midweek Sabbath:** any day during the week. This works best for people with odd or sporadic work schedules and have a midweek day off.

I recommend you begin in the evening — with dinner or just before bed, but there's no “right way.” But a celebratory meal can really start your Sabbath off with the right intention. You can also invite friends or family to join you or cook the same meal each week to transition your mind from work to rest.

If at all possible, establish a regular rhythm of Sabbath on the same day each week.

2. Pick a ritual to clearly begin and end your Sabbath.

Much of the Sabbath is about rhythms and rituals that set aside the day as “holy.”

Beginning and ending with a marked moment will help you settle into rest and help you reenter the week with a restful spirit.

Here are a few ideas of how to begin the Sabbath from both ancient tradition and modern practice:

- Light two candles (symbolic for the two commands in Exodus and Deuteronomy to “remember” and “observe” the Sabbath). Invite the Spirit of Jesus to come and give your home light, joy, love, peace, and rest.
- Pour a glass of wine (or grape juice for the kids). Pray a blessing over the drink and give thanks.
- If you have a family, this is where, traditionally, the father speaks a blessing over the children and the mother. If you’re with roommates or friends, this can be a wonderful time to bless each other with prayers like: May you be happy and full of joy. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May you find rest for your soul. Etc.

- Read a Psalm, sing a song, quote a poem, or pray a liturgy to center on God.
- Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to bring a spirit of rest over your life and lead and guide you through the next 24 hours.
- If you begin at night, share a meal with your family or friends.
- If you begin in the morning, go to church and worship.

Here are a few ideas to end your Sabbath:

- Take a slow, leisurely prayer walk around your neighborhood, nearby park, or nature reserve.
- Read a psalm.
- Share a meal with family and friends.
- Spend some time alone or with your family and friends in prayers of gratitude.
- Traditionally, the Sabbath ends by sitting on the floor, lighting a special Havdalah candle, and sharing 1) the best part of your Sabbath, and 2) what you are looking forward to in the week ahead, passing around sweet-smelling spices to savor the day and ending with prayers of gratitude.

3. Spend an entire day in the four aspects of Sabbath: stopping, resting, delighting, and worshiping.

Fill your day with activities that are life-giving for your soul. Begin to distinguish between recreation and restoration. Begin to transition from entertainment, TV, social media, shopping, and going “out,” to activities that deeply connect you to Jesus and his rest.

Traditionally there are 12 activities that mark Sabbath practice:

- Lighting the candles.
- Blessing the children.
- Eating a meal.
- Singing.
- Worshiping with your community.
- Walking.
- Napping.
- Making love to your spouse.
- Reading.
- Spending time alone with God.
- Spending time with family and friends.
- Gratitude.

This is not a “to do” list: there are no “to do’s” on Sabbath! No oughts or shoulds. This is just a list of activities many people find restful and restorative.

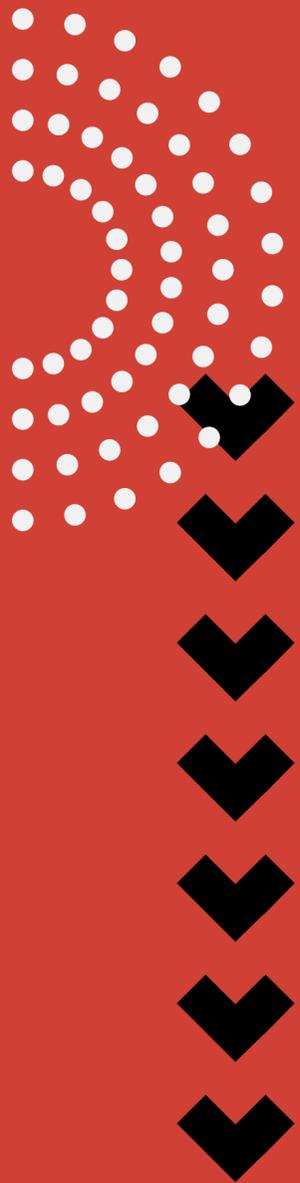
Again, there is no “right way.” Adapt your Sabbath practice to your personality, preferences, stage of life, and however it is you connect with God: time in nature, walking your dog to the park, playing frisbee golf with your kids, getting lost in a good novel, etc. Just take the day to pamper your soul in God’s presence.

If “how” to do this is unclear to you, don’t feel bad, you’re not alone. Spend a few minutes thinking and praying over these simple questions:

What about my regular routine would I need to stop to experience the Sabbath?

- What is restful for me?
- What brings me an easy delight?
- What is a worshipful way I connect to God?

The Third Practice: Simplicity





Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

– Jesus

READ

The Chapter labeled, “Simplicity.”

We’ve all heard about the Marie Kondo method for organization and cutting back on all your junk. But this practice is about much more than just cutting clutter (though that is where it starts). Simplicity, in John Mark Comer’s words, is about **“intentionally living with less, to make space for more of what we most value before God.”**

We often think the more we have, the better off we are. But simplicity is where true freedom can be found, and not just when it comes to our closets or junk drawers. The practice of simplicity is a lifestyle, and when exercised properly, influences everything from the activities we take on, to how we spend our money, and what we give our time to.

REFLECT

1. Complete the sentence: “I will be happy when _____.” Examine how you completed the sentence. What is it that quietly lures you into the desire for more?

2. John Mark paraphrases Jesus when he says, “Where you put your resources is where you put your heart. It’s the steering wheel to your engine of desire.” If a stranger were to examine your spending habits, what would they conclude you care most about?

3. Talking about money, spending in particular, can be difficult because we’re not just talking about money; we’re talking about desire, what we want most. It can be challenging (at best) and threatening (at worst). What are you feeling at the end of this chapter? Can you lean into the discomfort and discern what you may be invited to experience through this teaching?

4. “To follow Jesus, especially in the Western world, is to live in that same tension between grateful, happy enjoyment of nice, beautiful things, and simplicity. And when in doubt, to err on the side of generous, simple living.” Where do you find yourself in this tension?

5. Which of the 12 principles proposed in this chapter stuck out to you the most (skim over pg. 205-212)? Which principle seemed the most difficult to accept or put into practice?

6. John Mark ends this chapter by saying, “You have everything you need right now to be happy. Do you find yourself agreeing with that statement or wanting to argue, “Yes, but...?”



PRACTICE

#1 Revisit John Mark Comer's top 12 practices for simplicity (pp. 205-213).

Choose one practice to try this week.

#2 Simplify your Closet

Below is a guide from “How to Unhurry” that details how to go about simplifying your closet. Remember, this practice is not just about cleaning out your closet or your junk drawer, but that is where you can begin. What’s the point? Help yourself realize that by intentionally living with less, you’re making space for more of what really matters.

Simplify Your Closet!

1. To begin, take everything out of your closet(s) and throw it in a giant pile.
2. Sort your giant pile into five smaller piles:

Keep

Give away

Sell

Throw away or recycle

Wait

Stick any emotional items you’re not quite ready to get rid of in this pile, and then stick it in a closet or garage for 3-6 months. If at any point you want to get an item back out, go for it. But more likely, you won’t think about it until you reopen the bag or box, at which point, it will be much easier to get rid of, should you decide to.

3. Place the “Keep” pile back in your closet in an organized manner.

If you’re feeling ambitious, or if cleaning out your closet has you itching to tackle other areas, here are a few more things you can work on simplifying over the next few weeks:

Stuff — go through your home room by room and organize your stuff into the same four piles as above.

Papers — we all have a drawer here or a counter space there littered with papers and old bills. Now’s your chance to digitize what you can, recycle what you can’t, and organize what’s left.

Budget — use whatever method you prefer, just make sure you do everything you can to live under your means, not at your means.

Schedule — get a fixed-hour schedule and add in your sleep time, spiritual disciplines, core relationships, daily habits (exercise, reading, etc.), and key work habits (meetings, email, deep work). Don’t forget to block off some time for free time or rest!



The Fourth Practice: Slowing





*Our **time** is our life, and our **attention**
is the doorway to our hearts.*

– John Mark Comer





READ

The Chapter on “Slowing.”

When is the last time you deliberately chose to *slow down*? This particular practice goes against everything we think should be true. We get mad at the cars driving the speed limit on the highway. Fast food restaurants make billions every year for a reason! New technologies are developed all the time to make things faster and more efficient.

Slowing down doesn't appeal to us until we've reached the point of burnout. But, if hurry truly is the great enemy of spiritual life, then we must learn to live at a slower pace.

This week's practice is all about creating “speed bumps” in your routine. As John Mark Comer shares, if you deliberately slow down your body, you'll slow down your life.

REFLECT

1. "We achieve inner peace when our schedules are aligned with our values." Look back over your last seven days. Does where you gave your attention align to what you value most? What needs to be realigned?

2. John Mark reveals 20 different ideas for how you might "gamify" your spiritual growth (look back over pg. 223-243). Which ideas stuck out to you? Which will you try this week? Did any make you feel anxious just *thinking* about putting into practice? Why?

3. John Mark argues that *every* single thing we let into our minds will have an effect on our souls." (Yikes!) Consider what you consume regularly: TV shows. News. Social media. Books. What is your soul being fed? How is it nourished by these things? What nourishment does your soul *need* in order to grow and be healthy?



PRACTICE

1. Pick 1-3 ideas from Comer's list or your own imagination and commit to them for at least a week (see pages 223-243).

See what it does to your soul. Pay attention to the difference in your body as the days go by. Keep whatever is helpful.



2. Practice presence through art.

There's a myth that we can pay half-attention to life during the "boring" moments — emails for work, running errands, mowing the lawn — and then save our full attention for the "really good moments" — play, days off, time with friends. But attention doesn't work like that. It's less a switch we turn on and off as we so choose and more of a muscle we exercise or let atrophy all day long via our habits of both mind and body.

The more that we multitask or daydream through the mundane tasks of everyday life, the less capacity we develop to fully enjoy and experience the sacred moments.

One way to train this muscle is to pick a medium of art that is calm, deep, and beautiful and give it your full attention. No phone. No distractions present.

Watch a film. If you want, invite some friends to join you and discuss it after, without reading any reviews online, simply by noticing its effect on your soul.

Read a novel in several long sittings. Resist the urge to get up or check your phone should it get "slow."

Listen to an entire album in one sitting, doing nothing else. Not as background noise, or a mood uptick, but as art you experience with God.

Let art re-teach you not only how to be present, but how to enjoy being present, in the many moments that join together into a life.



Lasting Impressions



Before you put this book away, take a moment to write out how you will commit to *unhurry* in 2021.

- What *one* practice did you find most challenging?
- What *one* practice did you find most rewarding?
- What *one* practice would you like to try that feels out of reach?
- How can you make room to try it this month?

Here's my last suggestion:

Write a letter to yourself. Two letters, actually.

- The first letter should be written to yourself ten years from now, if you were to continue living at your present speed. What do you imagine your life would look like? Consider your intimate relationships, your career, and your psychological and spiritual health.
- The second letter should be written to yourself ten years from now, if you were to consistently practice the habits of unhurried living. What do you imagine your life would look like? Consider your intimate relationships, your career, and your psychological and spiritual health.

Which letter do you want to reflect how your life will *actually* be in a decade?

Are you willing to do the work?

