

SELECTED THOUGHTS ON OUR OVERLOADED CONDITION

from Dr. Richard Swenson

THE NEW HUMAN CONDITION

“What is the typical response to overload? Just like an alarm clock we ignore, when the overload alarms go off in our lives, we hit the snooze button. The issues are too big, the challenges too great. And besides, we’re tired, so we roll over and go back to sleep. ‘Hopefully,’ we mutter, ‘when it goes off next time, these problems will be gone.’ But overload is not going away. Thanks to progress, it is the new human condition. And it is unavoidable. As we have seen, progress works by always giving us more. Of everything. Faster and faster. Often at exponential rates.”

“Because progress isn’t going to change, WE have to change. Simply put, we need to learn to live under these new conditions. We have to learn about the reality of human limits. We have to discover where our threshold lines are. We have to learn to ACCEPT our limits—no easy task when we have been programmed for growth and expansion. The rules of life are different on this side of overload, and we need to understand the practical implications for living, for working, for relationships, for faith.”

“Passivity is not a valid response. We must become active agents, forging the kind of response that is spiritually and relationally authentic. We need to intentionally cultivate a margin to buffer ourselves against the onslaught of overload. Many people, however, are too busy surviving each day to think deeply about it. Others are too frightened to make substantial change. Still others have the interest and resolve to change, but just don’t know what to do. This book has presented over 175 prescriptions for possible change in response to overload. Because each person is different, each will make different choices from among these prescriptions.”

CHOOSING APPROPRIATE CHANGE

“Regarding appropriate change, some things we cannot change, some things we can change, and some things we MUST change. Those things we MUST change go beyond the realm of preference and enter the realm of Truth. When God says something that pertains to Truth, it is best if we listen. Even if we don’t feel like it, we ought to pay attention and act on His advice. Even if the entire culture endorses the polar opposite, we should still listen to God. Even if it costs us everything, we should do it. God’s advice always turns out to be the healthy option, even when it doesn’t seem so at first. This is part of the narrow road of faith.”

“It is important to follow God because He is really the only One who knows where He is going. He has given us instructions and expects us to follow them. ‘Why do you call me Lord, Lord,’ asked Jesus, ‘and do not do what I say?’ Luke 6:46 If we wish to demonstrate our love for God, explained Jesus, we should do it through our obedience. If we do not obey, apparently, we do not love (John 14:15, 21, 23-24). It is a reliable marker. God still has opinions about things. He will let us choose

whatever we want. But he is always right, which means if we choose contrary to His opinion, we end up being wrong. Being wrong carries a penalty. It is far better being right.”

What are the things we must do? We must forgive. We must be content. We must not judge, but instead grant grace, the kind that God has granted us. We must gently tell others the reason for the hope within us (I John 4:8, Matt. 22:36-39, Gal. 5:14, I Cor. 13:2). **BUT MOST OF ALL, WE MUST LOVE. NOT MONEY, NOT THINGS, BUT PEOPLE. WE MUST INVEST OURSELVES IN THOSE RELATIONSHIPS GOD HAS BLESSED US WITH.** Overload tends to block such an investment. Overload tends to obstruct the flow of love. This is why the problem of overload deserves high attention on our spiritual agenda.”

FOLLOWING THE MAP

“Although in our traveling we routinely focus on a destination, too few of us do the same in our living. Yesterday passes and tomorrow arrives, while our randomness builds only a house upon the sand. Doesn’t it make sense to set our compasses on the Son, to travel in His direction? Choosing the Kingdom road, we are warned is not easy. The gate is small and the way is narrow. Only a few find it (Matt. 7:14). These words ought to stir our vigilance and sharpen our focus. Jesus was exceptionally focused. His intent was the glory of the Father, and nothing could distract Him from it.”

“Contemporary overloading opposes focusing in at least two ways: dilution and distraction. Dilution occurs when too much comes too fast, and relationships are especially vulnerable to dilution. Distraction is an interruption phenomenon that breaks the momentum required for focusing. Because we would be incapable of guessing in which direction Truth lies, God has agreed to help us. His Word is our manual, and without it, we would have no hope. It was given not to punish us, but to free us and guide us back to Him. With its help we can rediscover what the appropriate content of our focusing ought to be—LOVE.

BECOMING GOAL-FOCUSED AND GOD-FOCUSED

Here are some principles to assist us in our focusing task against the backdrop of increasing overload:

1. Commit to focusing—determine life purpose and concentrate on it.
2. Accept responsibility—choose to focus on God’s Kingdom and His righteousness.
3. Do NOT focus on the faults of others—concentrate on your own.
4. Study the Scriptures, our only accurate guide—rout out opinions and replace them with Truth.
5. **ABOVE ALL, FOCUS ON THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE LOVE OF HIS PEOPLE. THESE ARE THE NOBLEST OF ALL ENDEAVORS, THE HIGHEST OF ALL PRIVILEGES, AND THE SUM OF ALL EXISTENCE.**

“Is our randomized righteousness enough to please Him? Never. But this is not bad news. If focusing is our duty, it is also our joy. If holding to the narrow road is our obedience, it is also our deliverance. Walking toward the Son is the best thing to do when you live in a storm. Imminent death has a way of focusing our attention as nothing else. Priorities are straightened out with a jerk. Our

relational failures and successes are suddenly magnified, and we wonder how all the distractions of busyness could have obscured what has now become so obvious.”

“When I lie on my deathbed, I don’t want to hid behind the excuse of overload. I want to be able to look at my family in the eye, each one, and say ‘I love you,’ and I want the experience of my life to confirm those words. Overload distracts us from the true meaning of life. Overload distracts us from love. And in the end, the excuses don’t hold up. THE CHOISE, IT TURNS OUT, HAS ALWAYS BEEN OURS. WE want comfortable excuses. Instead, GOD gives us the choice. It is in the hardest of life’s choices that love is most clearly revealed.”

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.

I Corinthians 13