Opinion
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Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Tom Sodoge)

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Pulitzer Prize-winning American novelist Cormac McCarthy has said that insights spring from the subconscious and require a lot of "staring at your shoes."

I don't think he literally meant we must stare stupidly at our shoes, waiting for something magical to happen. I suspect it was his way of saying we need to stop and give our minds some breathing room and often answers will come. Our hearts, minds, and souls are capable of seeing and accomplishing amazing things, given the chance to get a word in edgewise.

The world has become such an angry, inhospitable place, the idea of stepping back from the fray to reflect feels culturally unacceptable. We're expected to respond now and do it brilliantly. But we're not machines. Our minds don't do their best work at the speed of the technology that surrounds us.

So what happens? With no emotional bandwidth or margin, our culture's go-to response — whether to personal issues or to grander political or social justice issues — is a knee-jerk "take cover and reload" mentality, where we fling ourselves back into the cultural fray and he who shouts the loudest wins.

How's that working?

Maybe we should spend more time staring at our shoes.

A few months ago, I took a nasty fall. It forced me to set aside my carefully-planned agenda and spend a lot of time taking McCarthy's advice. I was surprised at some of the insights that bubbled up:

- Action does not always produce more results than standing still.
- Sometimes more is just more, not better. Know when to stop.
- There's enough time to do everything God wants me to do. If I don't feel I have enough time, maybe I'm doing things I'm not supposed to be doing.
- Our "place" in this world is by God's side in all matters. All other locations are immaterial.
- Waiting is not the same as trust.
- Rest is not the same as laziness.
- Purpose is about putting things in their rightful place, knowing what is or is not important, and letting go of what's not your job.

- Faith is acting like God is telling the truth. It means cutting off all escape routes.
- Sometimes fear gets in our blood, and only God can change us.
- Motivation changes a person's actions. Inspiration changes the way they think. Most people don't change their actions until they change their mind. It takes time thinking to change your mind.
- Hanging out with God is like being on oxygen. You don't feel so panicky because you realize you can take long, deep breaths and there's more where that came from.
- If something is of no interest to God, maybe it should not be of high value to us.
- Don't obsess about being unable to "do it all" and disappointing people. You will. Get over it.

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You may be thinking, "So what do all these pithy words of wisdom do to solve the immigration crisis or the partisan politics in Washington?"

Nothing. At least not yet. But the insights are changing my heart, and that's a good place to start changing the world. If we all changed our behavior to reflect even a few of these insights and other insights you may have, it might change the environment in which we marinate each day. Then, drip by drip, other things might change, too.

When you think about it, pausing sounds so weak in a world that measures things by speed and output. How can you tell if there's an adequate "return on investment" for the time spent staring at your shoes? World leaders apparently need no convincing. I've heard that when Tony Blair was prime minister of the United Kingdom, he often took time to sit by a pond and think, and that Warren Buffet schedules time every day to sit by a window and reflect.

For me, my unexpected downtime made me realize how my heart and soul have become tainted with the despair and hopelessness of the parade of horribles that dance daily across our screens. But staring at my shoes gave me breathing room to recalibrate my heart to the eternal values I claim to espouse. It gives peace and hope room to grow. It makes it safe for new solutions to emerge.

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So when I hear someone say how the world would be a better place if those people out there would just shape up, I wonder what would happen if we shaped up first. It's the only place to start.

Make a commitment to spend more time staring at your shoes. God might change your perspective in unexpected ways and deploy you in a whole new direction — one with fresh ideas and solutions that will benefit all of us.

[Verla Wallace is an award-winning news anchor, reporter and talk show host. Her latest book is *Revolt of a Well-Intentioned Life, the Backroads Adventure that Changed Everything*. This column is adapted from her blog, Pilgrim On the Loose.]

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