



RESIST THE PATTERNS OF THIS WORLD

By Lauren McCombie Smith, FYT Movement Advocate

I don't know what your desk looks like right now, but mine is buried deep in Autumn term youth club admin, as my ministry attempts to "get back to normal". Getting back to normal seems to be the goal. The disruption and trauma of the last year and a half fading to memory as life starts to return to a familiar pattern. But do we actually want to go back?

I live in the South East of England and the pace of life in this part of the country is intense. As I emerge from the season of slow that the pandemic enforced, I find myself reluctant to return to the same old patterns of pre-pandemic life; as I'm not sure that they were healthy.

When I started with Frontier Youth Trust in May we explored the lessons we had gleaned from the season of slow and whether there was gold there that should be carried forward. Like many youth workers, my youth work practice had been a relentless turning wheel that had only accelerated in pace in the unknown of the Covid season. Although the idea of going slower is not new, when it comes to working with young people, it feels radical.

This year we have been asking: what it could look like to go slow in working with young people. We explored this across the movement with articles, reflections and online discussions - some of which are shared now in this edition of News. We have noticed a shared hunger to slow down to intentionally make space for the things that really mattered to people: relationships, people, community, justice and following God.

As we explored this further it became clear that resistance is bubbling below the surface: a resistance to return to "normal". A resistance to return to both the roller coaster intensity of pandemic youth work and the fast pace we were maintaining pre-covid.

Together, we find ourselves journeying from slow to resistance. Resisting to conform to the pattern of this world but to find transformation in our personal lives, our youth work practice, in the lives of young people, and within the structural systems that shape us. And ultimately follow God towards a better world for our young people.

contents



THE BEST THINGS CANNOT BE RUSHED

2



THE SLOW RISE

5



IS GOD SLOW?

7



A FUTURE NOT OUR OWN

7

THE BEST THINGS CANNOT BE RUSHED

By Emily Lonsdale, Youth Worker in Derby

It is Saturday afternoon and I am exhausted. This is not a new feeling and not one that is easy to solve. I have a condition that means I have chronic pain and I suffer from chronic fatigue syndrome. I have since I was a teenager. Actually this was the reason that I wanted to work with young people.

I wanted to create places where they could rest and learn the value of slowing down.

It's not easy, there is a perception of youth work that it needs to be all bounce, bounce, bounce! Never stop, never surrender! A ringleader youth worker playing crazy youth club games AND juggling the many demands of ministry. Young people simply watch in awe and follow their example into good clean-cut adulthood.

This is fine... but not all the time.

The pressure of youth ministry is immense and I wonder if this is why there are so few youth workers over the

age of 30. I have so many friends who were great youth workers who could not continue. They never found the balance - or were never allowed to find it (?). A youth worker who admits to being tired might find themselves being 'moved on'. When I started working for the Church, I fell into this trap. I went through three jobs before I realised that I was not the poster girl for that kind of youth work.

I took a sidestep into running a youth centre where I could create spaces owned and led by young people. I spent five years there showing young people the value of rest. In particular I remember starting a group for young people who were out of education due to ill-health. Here we could go slow when needed. This had personal significance because of my experiences of isolation and ill health at school. I loved giving this small group the time and space that they needed, through simple things like watching films and playing board games.

When I had children of my own I stepped away to focus on them. Out of a youth ministry role I was able to invest in my family and volunteer leading an all-age community craft centre. I have had to learn this lesson over and over. In a moment of madness, I decided to return to church youth work. But I quickly realised I need to walk my own road, at my own pace.

Now I'm trying something new. I am learning about my community, building bridges, and working slowly to be in the right place to start a new project. I am trusting it will happen - but it takes time. I would love to snap my fingers and be ready, but I have learned that some things, the best things, cannot be rushed.

THE SLOW RISE

Dylan Barker, FYT Movement Enabler

'Slow' has to be an intentional choice. With technology getting ever faster, it can feel like speed is the name of the game – especially in youth work: and with restrictions lifting, there was a pressure to make up for lost time. Across the FYT movement we have been exploring the theme of 'going slow' in working with young people.

BREAD MAKING

Some of our community met up online to make slow-rise bread – dough that would take 24 hours to prove in the fridge.

While mixing, kneading and proving, we used the metaphor to discuss going slow in our communities and youth work. We listened to those who had been in their communities for over 10 years now working with the children of the young people they started with. We lamented the lost potential of short-term contracts.

As we took a step back to let the yeast do the work, we reflected on how going slowly is an opportunity to notice: To notice God's hand at work, and to notice



seeds planted in young people begin to take root. We shared ways of taking time to stop, notice and reset. Some retreated, others walked their neighbourhood, and a few advocated for cold openwater swimming!

The next day we shared photos online of our loaves. As I spread my toast with butter and honey, I was reminded again that good things often take and need time.

I have this one young person who I met out on detached when he was about 7yrs old. I used to push him on the swings in the park. He's now 17 and a parent. He's still coming to one of our groups. It's a really long journey with many highs and some lows. It's not the quick wins but the slow journeying with him & his family - and he's become a gatekeeper to many others.

WHAT'S THE SLOWEST PIECE OF THE YOUTH WORK YOU'VE DONE?

A slow piece of youth work I did was, to take a group away on a Fri to Sun residential with no

agenda or activities planned. We spent the time hanging out, cooking, eating watching movies and sitting around bonfires. Back then it felt quite radical to have to no agenda and nothing to show for it at the end. This is now my preferred way of doing residential

Slow youth work feels like the anthesis of the world right now (not the Covid affected world but the rhetoric that we all live tangled up in) and also feels like an upside-down thing that Jesus would have liked and others would have got riled up by! I really hope that after these years of the pandemic the Youth Worker community will focus on the 'slow'. there has been so much extra that has been broken over this last year for young people and their communities and there will be no quick fix for any of it. Instead my prayer is that deeper, slower, more nourishing, stronger relationships will be born from the rubble through the slow and steady beat of feet walking alongside each other.

I think self-care in the workplace is really difficult. They are a buzz topic at the moment, but its treated as a bit of a 'dream on' idea. Often in small charities people are giving up a lot and throwing all they have into the cause. So having time to actually implement slowing down practices for well-being seems not only like a luxury we can't afford; but also counter intuitive to getting some very important stuff done. The culture of hurry hasn't cottoned onto the idea that when people are in a good place productivity and effectiveness are higher. We live in a cult of busyness where speed, a full schedule and a hectic lifestyle are measures of success. Sadly it feels like the church (and youth ministry) has allowed itself to be influenced by this culture.

IN YOUR SLOW YOUTH WORK, HOW DO YOU PRACTICE SELF CARE?

WHEN HAS RESISTING A FAST PACE IN YOUR YOUTH WORK MADE A DIFFERENCE?

A few years ago we changed gear on our summer programme - we had been running an activity club in the church hall with volunteers making the food. We realised we were burning ourselves out making lunch and not present with the young people. We shifted to a picnic in the park model and paid a local cafe to make lunches. People brought their families. Youth workers were more present with people. It was a small change, but it's made a big difference to how our summer stuff runs - and incidentally to the scale, because the slower model is a lot more scalable.

IS GOD SLOW?

By Rich Martin, Youth Worker in Devon

What is slow? Whose definition of slow are we holding as a controlling factor of how we spend our day – and why do we have to justify our productivity and speed? Who bestowed these pressures on me?!
“Do not worry” (Matthew something or other!)

Can the idea and language of slowing down be described as refocusing, becoming one with, living in the now? Is sitting in a room, watching a candle burn or any activity that we might associate with slowing down actually an act of slowing down, or does this act allow us to connect to a beautiful flow of energy by quieting our minds, and refocusing on what's important, allowing another's voice more important than our own into our head space which will therefore allow us to move more quickly into the flow and way of thinking and being that allows us to act with clarity, responding to people with confidence in the place where God has asked us to live.

Is the long view long, or is it the path?

Is the sabbath slowing down or gearing up?

Or is it slowing us down so we can gear up?

Of course our minds can go so fast that we need to 'slow them down' to take stock of what's done and who we are and who we are in God, and that if we don't do that then we run the risk of burning out, allowing ourselves to be swamped by inconsequential crap, but for me, really, sabbath values and practice speeds me up, because I move down a clearer more settled path that allows me to drink in the beautiful views around me as we walk through the garden of creation naming

new things hand in hand with God and the other, this is how real relationships are built, being with and responding to, trying to get your noisy impatient self out the way. Slowing down, means you take more in, your insights and experiences have more depth and a richer tapestry because you see, hear and feel more.

The Bible does talk a lot about waiting for God, in my mind that conjures up pictures of me tapping my watch and foot looking over my shoulder saying come on God, hurry up! As if I got there first and know better! Really there were other things to notice and to see before our paths begin to converge. I wonder if 'wait on God' could mean, wind your neck in! Not so much slow down waiting on God but 'ahh once again you are ahead of yourself, you need to see your actual position in this journey isn't as far ahead as you think it is mate, you're actually all the way back here, and there are things to see here, to learn about'.

‘Love has its speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore the speed the love of God walks. Once we grasp that in Christ God chooses to walk amongst us, it changes our whole understanding of the speed of love, and the speed of theology.’

Quote from Kosuke Koyama – Three Mile an Hour God

A PRAYER FOR THE SLOW YOUTH WORKER

A FUTURE NOT OUR OWN

Composed by Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw but often attributed to Bishop Oscar Romero. We have found this prayer resonant with our experiences of working with young people.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No programme accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.
That is what we are about.
We plant a seed that will one day grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realising that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

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