

EDITOR'S ETC.

BY DEAN MERRILL



Stampeding to Tomorrow

ECHOES OF OUR TIMES:

First person: "So how have you been lately?"

Second person: "Oh, keeping busy."

Pastor or other leader: "By the way, would you be interested in helping with the 8-year-olds?"

Church member: "Well, with the family and my job and all, things are really busy. . . ."

At least half the Christmas letters you got last December: "Well, it's been another busy year at the Smith house. First, we went to Disney World, then my mother came to visit, then . . ."

Busy has become the modern shibboleth—a word adults just *have* to say. It's the only acceptable reply when asked what you've been up to. I mean, if you haven't been busy, you must be lazy, a couch potato, a parasite. Ugh!

Run, run, run. See America run. I have a notion that if the Ten Commandments were put up for ratification today, nine of them would win handily. Few people would vote for worshipping idols or murdering or stealing. Even adul-

tery would be scorned (at least in theory).

The one commandment that might well lose would No. 4: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." Well, you know, that was Old Testament legalism, and we've all got a lot to do, and businesses can't really make it on just six days, and . . .

Then why did God take it so seriously? He apparently knew more about the human need for downtime than we admit ourselves.

Bill Clemmons, a Baptist retreat coordinator, writes about "an inward hunger that continually makes me aware that life was not meant to be lived 24 hours a day going at top speed. Speed kills, even when it's the sleepless activity of trying to grab all there is.

"We suffer today the pollution of activity, especially the pollution of unreflective living. We do and do, go and go, talk and talk. Finally, someplace and sometime, it all stops. Then just for a moment, we wonder, 'What does it all mean?'"

That's what Ruth Senter, busy suburban wife/mother/writer, found out by blocking out one whole weekday to spend at a children's hospital. In her article on page 28,

she tells how life slowed *way* down . . . the throbbing of the city traffic faded away . . . she met a young cerebral palsy victim named Gail, who had nothing to get busy about . . . but much to teach.

I learned a sobering lesson 14 years ago when a doctor looked at me and said, "You have a duodenal ulcer. What that means is, you'd better take another look at your life style, your schedule, the way you go at your work." That became a turning point for me. I decided that although I wouldn't become lazy, I would from then on *refuse to be stampeded*. In the face of pressure, I would take deeper breaths and keep control of my pace. I would make time for sabbath (the day, but even more importantly, the concept).

And the ulcer went away. "God calls us to let go and to live more deeply as pilgrims on a journey," says Clemmons. "The beginning is to get accustomed to silence and solitude and to develop an inward stillness out of which the rest of life can be lived. Then even the slightest whisper of God can be heard amidst the din."

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