
Slowing Down for Summer

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell, Vicar**

It's finally here!

We're back from our parish retreat. School is out—or will be next week. It's time to turn our attention to the summer.

The season invites us to slow down and run at a different pace. I am aware, though, that I often react to the days getting longer as if I just heard the starting gun calling me to run a different race. I find myself changing what I am doing, but not how I am doing it. I know I should thankfully be planning to get more rest, but instead I am eagerly charting out ways to get better at play. I am imagining more activities, more trips, more camps, more reading, and more prayer than the season can bear. It never occurred to me to do nothing.

In her book *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, Jenny Odell suggests another way. She invites us to put productivity aside and to cultivate presence, attention, and relational depth instead. Odell argues that the attention economy has hijacked our capacity to notice the world around us. It isn't just a problem of distraction, she says; it's a problem of meaning. "The point of doing nothing," she explains, "isn't to return to work refreshed, ready to be more productive. It's to resist the idea that our worth is tied to productivity at all." In this light, summer becomes more than a vacation season—it becomes a portal to deeper forms of attention and belonging.

To slow down is not to withdraw entirely but to reorient one's attention. It's about learning to see again. Odell describes time spent outside observing birds, plants, and the subtle shifts of season. "Nothing" became something—a radical noticing. In the summer months, when nature is in full display, we are offered similar opportunities: the whir of cicadas, the swell of fruit on a backyard vine, the smell of soil after an afternoon storm. Slowing down means attuning ourselves to these overlooked presences and letting them reshape our inner pace.

Odell's practice is deeply rooted in place. She encourages us to "leave the screen and go outside," not merely for exercise, but for immersion in what is right before us. When life spills outdoors—into parks, porches, and sidewalks—it's good to notice where we are. It's good to return to a favorite bench or walking trail, not for the sake of achieving a fitness goal, but for the joy of being somewhere fully. What Odell calls "situated awareness" is an antidote to the disembodied abstraction of online life. It roots us in community, ecology, and memory.

Slowing down, however, is not always easy. It means facing boredom, discomfort, or the fear of falling behind. But Odell invites us to see slowness as an ethical act. When we stop speeding through life, we become more available—to others, to the land, to ourselves. Relationships flourish in time-rich spaces. Communities deepen when people are not perpetually rushing past each other. And most counterculturally, when we slow down, we begin to imagine alternatives to the systems that demand constant hustle. "Doing nothing," Odell insists, "is about reclaiming our time and attention as our own."

This summer, I invite you to join me in slowing down and from time to time doing nothing -- not as an accident but as a calling. Jenny Odell's work reminds us that slowing down is different from checking out. Rather, it is a turning toward the world—not the world as marketed to us, but the world as it is full of nuance, wonder, and slow unfolding. To heed her invitation is to let summer be summer—not a season to conquer, but a season to dwell in.

This summer, we might try doing less and noticing more. We just might realize that, as Odell reminds us,

nothing is not an absence, it's a space where something deeper can grow. It's where we will find the presence of God and in doing so discover more of ourselves.

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