

How can you be productive and be seeing fruit from your life and yet not feel satisfied? How can you be full of achievements and successful and yet feel bored or unfulfilled? Have you been asking, “Isn’t there something more?”

You have probably been seeing a lot of football lately with the World Cup taking place in Brazil. It’s a game that takes 90 minutes but is split into two halves of 45 minutes each and separated by a half time of 15 minutes. Actually it’s a picture of our lives.

The first half of life: The first half is busy, going to school, discovering our identity, what we are good at, what we are made for, finding a partner in life, perhaps having kids and advancing our career, all the time trying to be as productive and successful as possible. In a nutshell, the first half of life is usually about: Who I am, what I know, where I’m going, who I am going with... Yes it’s about ME. That’s not necessarily bad, as long as we don’t stay in the first half of life, ALL of our life!

In the first half of life we can have big goals and yet when we accomplish them or begin to get close to achieving them, we often realise we are not so excited anymore. This is one of the signals that we are entering half time. We evaluate, we ask questions and we begin to realise we don’t know as much as we thought we did. The structures we have built don’t work anymore, the neat boundaries for our life have become a little blurred. Everything is a bit ambiguous! For many of us, that’s not a comfortable feeling. We like to fix things, put things in boxes, have things sorted and suddenly nothing quite fits.

We may be familiar with mid life crisis but perhaps we haven’t thought through the “two halves of life”, as Richard Rohr calls them. Or perhaps we haven’t thought about what happens at “half time” as Bob Buford talks about.

Thinking back I hit my mid life crisis in the early 90’s. I reflected at the end of one particular year and realised that I had accomplished my dreams of 20 years before and wondered what was to come next. The following year, 1993, was a pivotal year for me when I attended a 7 week leadership development programme run by Floyd McLung in California. During the course, God really spoke to my heart and called me to the ministry of developing leaders and challenged me with the thought that this was going to take the rest of my life to accomplish. It was a second half of life focus. My passion or purpose statement became clear and I prioritised my time and energy towards the development of leaders from that point on. Soon afterwards my immediate role of national leader in Scotland moved into a more influence role in the region and it has continued to be influence oriented ever since.

Half time: Half time in a football game is an important strategic time. It’s a break in the game that gives opportunity to look back and to look forward. You

are able to reflect and to see the mistakes you made in the first half, and then think ahead to see how you can restructure for the second half, develop new strategy for the particular challenge at hand and attack it with new motivation. Half time in our lives generally is more than the 15 minutes of a football game! It can actually go on for years. In some cases people stay in half time for the rest of their lives – they plateau, get comfortable and never move into the deeper, meaningful and more fulfilling second half.

As a team we were celebrating the 40th birthday of a friend the other day and we found ourselves praying for the start of something totally new. The saying goes, “Life begins at 40.” For my Mum it was really true. She retrained as a teacher in a keep fit movement and spent the rest of her years being fulfilled running classes and bringing a sense of new life, health and movement to so many women. What had happened? She had entered her second half of life. She had re-evaluated her time, her involvement, her passion and moved into something more meaningful.

As leaders we can become bored with what has excited us up to this point. We can lose passion for what once motivated us and so instead of doing more of the same, we desire something a bit different - a life that is deeper, more intimate, investing our time and energy into things that matter and making a difference in the world in some category.

Richard Rohr believes that you can't really enter into the second half of life without having some kind of suffering – emotional, psychological, social or physical. I think he is probably right. Suffering, if we let it, can lead us into a time of questioning all of our organised boxes that explain life, relationships and theology. It helps us take a fresh look at what is important and suffering can change our attitudes, opinions, priorities and commitments. We enter a new phase of life where we don't have all the answers but that doesn't matter so much anymore. Life begins to focus on serving, blessing and living for people. We grow in our understanding of what praying without ceasing really means as we enjoy an on-going conversation with God throughout our day. In a recent base leaders training, Lynn Green shared his second half of life ‘breath prayer’: *Keep me holy, humble and hidden.*

Ignatius Loyola, a Basque from Spain, the youngest of 12, was serving in the Spanish army when a cannonball crashed into his leg and he was crippled for life. While recovering, he began reading books about Christ and asked himself a question, “What if I should do great things for God like St. Francis or St. Dominic? From his experience came a manual of Spiritual exercises and at 38, reached half time, and manual in hand, he set off and limped to the university of Paris. There he recruited six students to start the Jesuits, who became the greatest force in the Catholic Reformation.

Thinking back I wonder if I was in half time for perhaps 10 years before entering the second half of life. As an aside – I think eldership is a second half of life topic and if you haven't entered the second half it's not so easy to understand.

At half time, there needs to be some serious thinking. Some things have to be let go of, in order to create some space for the new things to be developed in the

second half. You can't just keep adding on responsibilities and roles. Roles need to be delegated and often when there is a hanging on to a role, the individual stays in half time!

It is important to note though, that the two halves of life don't need to be equal in size. We can enter the second half in our 30's, 40's, or 80's – it all depends on that change of heart and learning the lessons that God has for us.

One of the paradoxes of success is that the things and ways which got you there, are seldom those things that keep you there. Charles Handy.

The easy option is to stay where we are. That's why so many people stay stuck in the first half or stay in a perpetual half time. For many, life is more comfortable in the known, familiar territory, even when we are sure that something better awaits us out there. The Israelites were talking of the promised land but couldn't leave the territory of Egypt. The first half of life had become home.

Buford paints a picture of the timeline like this:



This change perhaps is slightly easier for missionaries who may have had a taste of more significance in the first half. For them the second half is a change from direct line leadership success to influence leadership significance. Questions in the transition can arise like:

- If I give up my role, will I drift into insignificance – it seems like you are either in or out of the network of relationships.
- Exactly what will I do with my time? What will bring fulfilment?
- Will I find my niche? Will people want my contribution? Will I be valued?
- Will there be a place or platform for me?

Moving into the second half of life: Everyone reaches a point where they ask the question, “Is this as good as it gets?” If you are asking this or similar questions, then the answer is “No.” It can be better for everyone. The second half of life is about deepening our relationship with God, moving into maturity in our relationships, enjoying the meat rather than the milk of the word, investing in people, giving away what we have gained, being generous with our resources, building and supporting people and ministries, being strategic and effective with our time, ...

The first half of life is more about understanding my gifts, my identity, my calling and being successful as I can be, seeing ministry pioneered, established and being fruitful. The second half is nothing to do with me but rather a focus on others, although there is a new desire for learning. I went for my masters in my forties – a good half time activity that led me into my second half with a clear focus of leadership development. It's in the second half of life that we realise we know nothing.

Some would say the first half is about action – schooling, working, marriage and starting a family, climbing the ladder in work and struggling with time management. The second half is then more about gaining back control of your

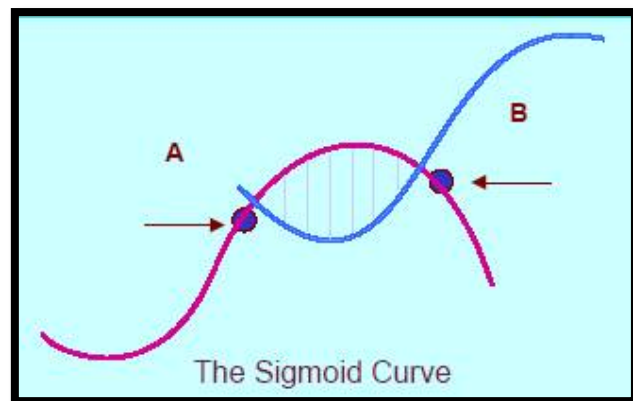
time and priorities. Perhaps there's some truth to that but I think it's more about losing control and letting everything go. Paul says, "I count everything as loss for the sake of Christ..." In letting go we become real servants, something which we didn't quite grasp in the first half. The problem can be that in the second half of life we are often looking for comfort, looking for time out, having an easier life, having put in our time and energy, now we are wanting some freedom. Actually that kind of thinking equals plateauing in half time and never moving into the second half.

Jesus spoke to the rich young ruler about the second half of life challenge, "Give everything away and follow me", but having gained a lot of wealth, it was so much easier for him to stay in the first half of life. He missed out – but there was something far greater waiting for him. There's something better for you too.

Charles Handy in his book, the age of paradox, talks about the Sigmoid curve: He shares that the secret of constant growth is to start a new sigmoid curve before the first one declines. The right place to start that second curve is at point A where there is the time, as well as the resources and energy, to get the new curve through its initial explorations and before the first curve begins to dip downward.

The normal pattern for most people is a single curve that rises as we approach middle age, then sharply falls off toward retirement. What Handy recommends is to start a new curve, preferably while the first one is still rising, but certainly before it begins to fall. Ideally life should consist of a series of overlapping curves.

People get stuck by continually training but not investing, by doing work but not seeing a new curve emerge, so they stay in the doing mode. But staying in the comfort zone too long causes loss of motivation and energy that is required for the change. I have known many who have had an inspiration for something new but it seemed too risky, too



uncomfortable to pursue and so they chose the easy road of staying where they were. Peter Drucker shares that retirees have not proved to be the fertile source of volunteer effort we once thought they would be. They cut their engines off and lose their edge. He believes that if you do not have a second or parallel career in service by age forty-five and if you are not vigorously involved in it by age fifty-five it will never happen. (Base leaders take note)

In fact Rite and I felt that at the age of 50 we needed to move away from Scotland and do something radically different or we never would. So we did what we had talked about for years and moved to Spain. It was a tough move but a right one – we learned lessons, we changed and we began to enjoy the second half of life – so can you. Take the risks and start something completely new.

Until next month

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