

Living the Questions: A Twentysomething's Battle with Restlessness

by Jennifer Sawyer

I spend a whole lot of time feeling restless. The type of restlessness that not only keeps me from sleeping at night, but dominates my entire mind with questions and anxieties and hesitations.

I've always been an anxious person. I worry about making my rent. I worry about my family's health. I worry if I'm in the right career. About when I'll settle down. If I should move. What I'll do next. I worry about how much I worry. My rational self knows that so many twentysomethings feel this way; that these are just growing pains; that this uncertainty too shall pass. But then I think, what if these feelings of restlessness never go away?

Where I want to be

Many of us are familiar with the well-known quote from St. Augustine's *Confessions*: "You made us for yourself Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." The restlessness that Augustine once thought was a terrible curse, he recognizes as a great blessing, one that keeps us from putting our true satisfaction in the hands of possessions, other people or ourselves. Sounds good in theory, but in my state it's pretty easy to think in terms of once I'm _____ (married/a millionaire/fill in the blank) this unsatisfied desire for more will subside. Maybe I'm pre-enlightened-Augustine in my thinking, but the suggestion that I'll always feel a little restless is a difficult pill to swallow.

I'm particularly aware of my restlessness at this point in my life, running circles around the question mark that sits between being content with where I am now and where I want to be. I'm 25 and living in one of the most exciting cities in the world. I'm surrounded by wonderful, supportive friends. I've established myself through work. I'm a member of a fantastic church that continues to challenge and enlighten me.

Yet, I feel like I have no idea what I'm doing. I'm single. I work in television, the sporadic nature and inconsistencies of which I'm starting to question. I wonder if I should leave the city, which I'm concerned has made me impatient and maybe a little jaded. Every time a Facebook friend posts about a new job, new house or new husband I experience, first, very genuine happiness for them, followed by a sudden onslaught of panic that these things will never ever happen for me — that I'll never feel settled. When I was a little girl, 25 seemed like the age when I would have absolutely everything figured out. Instead, I'm filled with restless concerns over the path I've chosen and what's in store for me in the future.

Restlessness is next to holiness

My young adult group recently finished reading a book by Michael Himes called *Doing the Truth in Love: Conversations about God, Relationships, and Service*. None of us had heard of the book before, but it touched all of us in one way or another. For me, the kicker came when I flipped the page to chapter three to find the title written especially for me, "The Journey of Restlessness: The Search for God."

Himes explains that restlessness is a fundamental characteristic of the human person, one in which we all long for a sense of fulfillment, compelled by our desires to want and strive for more. I had never thought of restlessness as a fundamental part of myself before, which probably supported my quest to rid myself of the feeling altogether. Instead of seeing our restlessness as a gift, we see it as a problem that needs a solution. I'm a fixer, and it drives me absolutely crazy that I can't fix this recurring, unsettling feeling. But, perhaps I shouldn't have to fix it.

We will always be restless, Himes says, which of course filled me with doom as soon as I read those words on the page. Himes looks at restlessness in terms of holiness, citing the 18th-century Puritan pastor Jonathan Edwards. Edwards claims that true holiness is "the consent of finite, creaturely, unfulfilled being to being finite, creaturely, and unfulfilled." In other words, you're made the way you are. Own it and see it as good. Incredibly tough, but not impossible; and if it makes me "holy," even better!

Many of my friends have heard me say lately that I'm feeling lost. I've always been a fairly decisive person, but these days I start the majority of my conversations with God using Thomas Merton's words, "Lord, I have no idea where I'm going. I do not see the road ahead of me..." While my head is

spinning and I find myself unsure of my next move, I recall one particular line from Himes' book that makes me feel like perhaps I'm not so hopelessly off course: "We would be absolutely lost if we were not restless. Why? Because our restlessness is what drives us to God at last, if we are faithful to it."

Faithfulness to my restlessness is something I can definitely do, because Lord knows it's not going anywhere anytime soon. In fact, our discussion of the book led me to recall a quote I keep on the backdrop of my computer, passed along to me by my caring roommate during what seemed like a particular moment of crisis. Taken from *Letters to a Young Poet*, in it Rainer Maria Rilke encourages the 19-year old Mr. Kappus, conflicted between following his art and entering the Austro-Hungarian Army, to "have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves, as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."

I may never achieve all that I hope to, but the restlessness, which I feel so hinders me, can actually be a creative power that drives me forward. A desire for the more, given to me by God, that will, hopefully, ultimately lead me back to God. Until then I will be here, continuing to live the questions.