

Character:  
today it's  
often just  
a letter in  
somebody's  
tweet!

twitter



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hand tremors, insomnia, problems with appetite and coordination and — in some people — heart palpitations.

On average, North Americans drink 210 milligrams of caffeine a day, the equivalent of two to three cups of coffee and a far cry from the 70 to 100 cups it would take to cause convulsions that could lead to death.

If dedicated Christians have a spiritual equivalent to caffeine, it's busyness and the relentless impulse to forever be doing something — anything — to show the depth and relevance of our faith almost as if we have to convince ourselves, not just others. Often, we think activity energizes both us and the church when, in actual fact, it just fools the Body into thinking we're not tired.

Taking our cues from the frenzied, often-frantic culture around us, we seem to assume that programs and participation in everything going on at church is the key to spiritual development. So we mask the fatigue with even more busyness, plugging up the natural impulse to rest and recuperate after bouts of meaningful activity. The more tired we get, the more guilt or pressure we feel, triggering even more busyness. After a while, our heart rewires itself to run on busyness and — when deprived of it — we go through withdrawal, until balance is restored.

Obviously, what we believe must be backed up by how we behave. As we read in James 2:17, "faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it's dead and useless." Living out our trust in God keeps us spiritually alert, loving and learning. But, too often, stimulated Christianity masks simulated Christianity. What's hyper isn't always holy or helpful. In fact, far too much of what the church does is driven by tradition or the latest trend.

Programs without purpose prevent progress. That's why everything we do should glorify God, encourage and build up the church, or reach out with the life-changing message of Jesus. Anything else will just make us jumpy, irritable and on-edge, especially when we're so busy there's no time for the prayer, rest, and reflection necessary to deepen our personal relationship with God.

So let's use our Spirit-given giftedness and do our share. We can find balance and still serve, alert and wide awake.



RICK GAMBLE

~ sharing Jesus and the journey ~



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## A Stimulating Proposal

You might call them caf-fiends.

They're the people who make ample use of North America's most widely-embraced drug: caffeine. More of it is consumed than all other legal and illegal drugs combined!

In America alone, they consume the equivalent of 530 million cups of coffee every day. The top sources are coffee, soft drinks, tea and chocolate, in that order. Though most people get the bulk of their caffeine from java, other sources include non-prescription pain killers, appetite suppressants and cold medications.

Though most people think caffeine keeps us awake by giving us more energy, the truth is it simply deceives our body into thinking it isn't tired. When our brain wearies and wants to slow up, it released the chemical adenosine. It goes to special cells called receptors where it works against the chemicals stimulating the brain. But caffeine races to the receptors and plugs them up so adenosine can't get through. That means the brain never gets the signal to take it easy and the chemicals that stimulate activity keep building.

Eventually the brain wises up and releases more receptor cells so the adenosine can get through. Then caffeine doesn't work anymore, unless you consume more to jam up the new receptor cells too. Soon, the brain rewires itself to run on caffeine. If you're deprived of the stuff for any reason, you have too many receptor cells to operate efficiently. That's why suddenly dropping a significant coffee habit can lead to headaches, fatigue, nausea and muscle-stiffness.

It takes a couple of weeks for the brain to reduce the number of receptor cells so most doctors recommend a gradual withdrawal from caffeine. Which is not to say the drug doesn't have significant benefits. It's proven to temporarily enhance alertness, comprehension, reflexes and speed of learning. On the downside, too much caffeine leads to

