

Distracted by distraction



Thomas Froese
ChristianWeek Columnist

If you're too busy to read this, just ignore it. I mean, really, I understand. We're well into 2014 and there's some serious new clinking and clanking that likely needs your attention.

Yes, in our brave new distracted world, the one that never really turns off anymore, (I was recently in a funeral in Uganda where the cell phones rang and rang and rang), it's a fresh year to slip further into it, this new place where it's hard to know what—and who—is real.

The latest jolt for me came through the discontinuation of a certain journal, one I've been using for about 20 years, *Journeying Through the Days*, an annual resource of Scripture and photography and wisdom from saints and prophets, all with some space for personal reflection.

The publisher, Upper Room Books, a long-time non-profit, prints resources in dozens of countries and languages to help Christians worldwide grow. Now it's discontinued this line because people apparently just aren't interested anymore.

Not interested in this sort of aid to help you meditate. And pray. And nourish your soul. And listen. As a Seattle bookstore owner confirmed to me, 'no, sorry, there's nothing else like this.'

By the way, how do you listen to God? And how do you listen to your life?

Because if there's one way God speaks, it's through our lives. Through our successes and failures. Through our relationships and lack of. Through our dreams and shattered dreams. Are you keeping track of much of it?

Or maybe it's much less. You go to the store for some bread. You walk the dog. You look out at a fresh blanket of snow. And it hits you. He hits you. He's been there all along. Holiness has been there.

Can you hear any of it? Or is the clanging too loud?

Or, for the believing crowd, maybe it's easier to fixate on other things like, say, dogma. After all, people are so complicated. All this thorny flesh and blood we're stuck in. It's much easier to be an ideological Christian, people who are, as Pope Francis put it, "a serious illness in the Church."

In either case, we're left with this ocean, this water, water everywhere with nothing to drink.

It came up recently in my African home. A Canadian visitor working in communications told me about her project, a new online portal for especially Canadians, believers and non-believers alike, to find nourishment for their souls.

I nodded. "We can't disengage. We need to live where the rest of the world lives. The challenge is giving some depth in an ocean so shallow."

"That's exactly it," she said. Of course, this isn't new. T.S.

Eliot said decades ago "we're distracted from distraction by distraction." Thousands of years earlier, the Hebrew prophet said the same: "Do you not know? Have you not heard?"

What's different is how easily we can now send out these edited images of ourselves (no more than 140 characters please), not the real deal. And without the right tools, like this discontinued Upper Room journal, we can easily forget who we are as muddy and nuanced human beings.


It's as true in Africa as it is in Canada as it is on the moon or anywhere else.

Float along far enough and, it seems to me, this old world won't need much of a bang to come to an end. No, to quote those forgotten poet-prophets, a whimper will do the job just fine.

Thomas Froese writes about international issues. His blog on fatherhood is at www.dailydad.net, his other commentaries at www.thomasfroese.com

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