Pay Attention to the Frog

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EDITOR’S NOTE

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Faithful Colleagues,

Ever since my first visit over a decade ago, Southwestern Montana is my self-identified “God spot.” The mountains, trout streams, wildlife, rugged terrain and night skies, for whatever reason, help me see my place in the universe. While there, I feel simultaneously big and small, significant and insignificant.

My oldest brother and I make a yearly pilgrimage to Bozeman where we revisit our favorite rivers, hikes, and pizza joints. This summer we brought along our families. My family—my wife Kelly, our three kids (two of them teenagers), and myself, represent the American masses that live in overdrive and overload. So imagine the jolt for all of us when a month prior to departure, Kelly and I announced that our trip would be technology-free from start to finish. No iPhones, no laptops, no Wi-Fi, Amen.

Within 12 hours of arriving in Montana, I found myself at the Bozeman Hospital emergency room (the address for which, sans Wi-Fi, I had to look up in a local phone book!) suffering from a broken foot. Sure, the absence of technology was one step toward a slower life, but this unexpected variable slowed life to a literal and metaphorical limp. Fly-fishing from the banks rather than wading the rivers, hanging out at the base of trails while others hiked ahead, and finding a bench on the downtown square during shopping excursions allowed me to notice life, and its fullness, in a new way.

As I returned home, despite being on crutches, I found myself more hopeful than ever. I had received a dose of freedom from the rat race and that liberation was truly life giving. For one week, I experienced the opposite of the research that says we’re living in a world where our interactions with computers outpace encounters with people for the first time in history. For seven days, I was not guilty of what Daniel Goleman calls “the impoverishment of attention” in his recent book Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence (p. 7).

Most of all, my one week under the big sky opened a powerful space for me to reflect on the consequences of the other 51 weeks I spend on the hamster wheel. I suspect I represent many other hamster-About Campus-readers. I’m certain the effects of our “wheels” are profound and include missing the humans in front of us and the joy of discovering what our lives mean.

This edition of About Campus is an invitation—an invitation to slow down, pay attention to the brilliance surrounding you, and to re-discover whatever it is your life should not be costing you. From the wise counsel of Frederick Buechner in Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations with Frederick Buechner: “Pay attention to the frog. Pay attention to the west wind. Pay attention to the boy on the raft, the lady in the tower, the old man on the train. In sum, pay attention to the world and all that dwells therein and thereby learn at last to pay attention to yourself and all that dwells therein” (p. 51).

With hope,

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