

Fatal Distractions : White Noise

By Gemma Neill

PROP: Ewan the Sheep. Explain how Ewan the sheep is a white noise machine that we use to help Seth sleep. It blocks out all the background noises. We use it so much that now I don't think I would be able to sleep without the sounds of Ewan in the background.

Because the truth is life is loud. Have you ever stopped to think about how noisy life is?! It's all around us with so many things vying for our attention constantly.

If I just think about all the noise in a day of my own life - there's the kids in the background, the dog in the background, the theme tune of the kids TV shows in the background, we have the radio one when driving to school, I listen to a podcast when I walk the dog, I might have an audiobook playing while I do some housework, there's appliances beeping at me telling me it's time to empty them, a knock at the front door with a parcel being delivered, the sound of an email arriving, the red dots next to icons on my phone which, although in themselves are silent, really they are screaming at me that there's a notification to be looked at, Pinterest suggestions to go through, instagram comments to read, updates to be made, what's apps to reply to, a gumtree sale to be made, and then sometimes, a strange thing happens and my phone even rings! Does anyone recognise this (show test pattern F image) - there as a time when TV was actually turned off - as in nothing was being broadcast. And this is just all the external noise - don't even get me started on the mental chatter constantly going on in my head.

Life is loud! We are addicted to noise...

Does anyone recognise this (show test pattern F image) - there as a time when TV was actually turned off - as in nothing was being broadcast. Every single minute on the planet, YouTube users upload 400 hours of video I wonder if you were waiting for something - maybe in the dentists waiting room or at the bus stop - how long do you think you could leave it until you popped some headphones in or started scrolling on your phone?!

Raphael - TV on, radio on, scrolling on his phone, listening to me - all at the same time! How many of you have the TV on, not to watch, but just for the background noise when you are at home? There's this weird noise multi-tasking thing we do.

We live in the age of noise.

Why does the noise matter?

For some of us in this room, this constant bombardment of noise can leave us feeling stressed out, irritable, distractible and lacking in focus, and overwhelmed. For me in the mornings lots of noise as we start the day I can get snappy.

For others in the room perhaps you genuinely like the noise. You are the person with the TV on but not watching it, the radio playing when you are taking a bath - you enjoy it.

But can all this noise be a fatal distraction to us?

Going back to Ewan, white noise is there to block out other sounds so we have to ask ourselves, with this constant noise around us, whether we are the type of person who likes it or not, what is the noise blocking out?

An American author, Andrew Sullivan, wrote for New York magazine:

'This new epidemic of distraction is our civilisations specific weakness. And it's threat is not so much to our minds, even as they shape-shift under the pressure. The threat is to our souls. At this rate, if the noise does not relent, we might even forget we have any.'

It's a threat to our souls.

In the midst of all this noise then, how then, are we to make sure that our souls can thrive.

Matthew 3:16-4:3 (NIV)

As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him

Wilderness = eremos = quiet place

For me when I have read this story before the wilderness has had really negative connotations. It sounds dangerous and lonely. This story always sounded like a bad experience for Jesus to be tempted by the devil out there all alone, weak from hunger. I would prefer it if the devil had tempted Jesus right after the baptism service when he was on a high. It seems sneaky and unfair of the devil to come at him in a place of weakness in the wilderness. But now, I think I was wrong.

The wilderness was Jesus's quiet place, and it was off the back of his time in the quiet that Jesus was able to take on the devil himself. The quiet time in the wilderness wasn't a time that weakened Jesus - it did the opposite - it strengthened Him.

As you read on in this passage as the devil tempts Jesus you see Jesus came out of his quiet place in the wilderness with such confidence, he comes out of the quiet place with such a sense of identity, he comes out of this quiet place with a sense of purpose, a sense of who God is, He comes out strong and focused.

Sounds good right? To feel strong and confident and focused, to feel brave, to have a sense of purpose and a true sense of our identity. Sounds like we could do with some time in that quiet place too right?

Jesus knew that eremos, the quiet place, was vital to life. That's why as you read on through the gospels you see him coming back to it time and time again. (List on screen - mark 1, mark 6, Luke 5)

The quiet place was a top priority for Jesus. It was part of the rhythm of Jesus daily life. If Jesus, the son of God, needed time in the quiet place, surely you and I need it even more.

If the noise of life is a threat to our souls, then the quiet place is the refuge of our soul. The refuge your soul has been crying out for or the refuge you didn't even realise your soul needed.

We need to regularly turn the noise down and find our quiet place.

But maybe this isn't new to you. Walk into any bookshop or library now a days, check out the book charts on amazon and you will find book after book teaching you all about what the secular world calls mindfulness. But really, mindfulness isn't anything new, the practice of getting alone and quiet has been part of the christian faith, forever in fact even before Jesus, in the Old Testament Psalms its written for us to 'be still and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10).

As a christian teenager in the mid 90's something we were taught to do which I don't think gets as much air time nowadays as it used to, was the practice of having a daily 'quiet time'. Simply a time everyday where we get away from everyone to be alone, in the quiet, with God. Everyday. To talk to God, read the Bible, listen to God.

And for those of you who aren't Christians mindfulness is basically the same thing, some silence and solitude for the secular world. It's just, mindfulness misses the best part - Jesus.

We asked ourselves earlier what is the white noise of life blocking out? The white noise of life is blocking out the sound of our own souls - its needs and stresses and hope and fears and perhaps that's where mindfulness could work for you. But the white noise of life is also blocking out the sounds of heaven, God's voice responding back to our souls cries and strengthening us just as Jesus was in the wilderness and perhaps that why finding the quiet place needs to be the priority for you.

We need to regularly turn the noise down and find our quiet place so we can hear God's voice.

It's time to go retro and bring back the quiet time.

We've seen with Jesus that there is power in a quiet time. A place to become centred again, to process things that are going on in life, to get our focus back onto God, to remind ourselves of our identity in Christ, to refresh ourselves with the promises in His word, to become more grounded in grace and truth and to get back in touch both with God and our own selves.

It's time to go retro and bring back the quiet time. Everyday, set aside a portion of time - 10mins, 20m an hour its up to you - but to set aside some time everyday, to be alone, in the quiet, just you, God and your Bible. Time to talk to God, hear from God and read His word. How?

TURN OFF THE WHITE NOISE

'When? I'm too busy':

I get it. It can be really hard. But its worth it. I've found that the busier and louder life gets, the more I need the quiet place. I'm a better mum, better wife, better human when I am prioritising the quiet place. I cope better with challenges, my internal dialogues are more healthy, my confidence is increase when I am prioritising the quiet place.

Try and identify a specific time for your quiet time. Put it on your calendar or in your phone. I would love to do it in the morning but kids wake at 5am so I have shifted it to evenings. Not my personal preference but like I have said I know I need time in the quiet place. My soul NEEDS it.

So often when life is busy and full of demands the first thing to go is our quiet time. We must prioritise time in the presence of God, you need to fight for it - your soul needs you to.

I'll get distracted

That's ok. Part of it is down to practice. Some of those 'distractions' are exactly what you need to be talking to God about in prayer so talk to him about it. Right then and there.

I find praying out loud helps.

Don't take your phone.

TUNE IN TO YOUR SOUL

It's too hard

It doesn't need to be complicated. There is no formula you have to follow. Just talk to God as you would a friend. Tell him what's on your mind.

Same with reading the Bible. It doesn't need to be complicated. Not always looking for a supernatural revelation. There are layers of revelation in scripture.

TURN UP THE SOUNDS OF HEAVEN

'I doubt God will listen/speak to me.'

Sometimes it can feel like our prayers are just bouncing off the ceiling, that all we can hear is the clock ticking.

God is always listening Micah 7:7 (NIV) **But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me.**

God is always speaking - Jesus is called 'the word'

It's time to go retro and bring back the quiet time.

So, when are you going to do it? When are you going to get away from the noise and give your soul some room to breathe? Morning? Evening? Lunch break? When?

Where? Decide now where you are going to go. A place in your house?

It's time to get back to the quiet place. To turn off the white noise of life, just for a few moments a day, to tune into the sounds of our soul and to turn up the sounds of heaven

We grow in the quiet, we get stronger in the quiet, we make sense of things in the quiet, God gives His best thoughts in the silence, we are refreshed in the quiet, our soul can breath again, our soul can expand, our focus becomes clearer, our senses more alive, clarity of thought comes, faith is built, dreams are born, doubts dispelled, hope birthed, brokenness healed, chains unlocked, confidence boosted.

Turn off the white noise

Tune in to your soul

Turn up the sounds of heaven

CS Lewis - make the whole universe a noise in the end

We will make the whole universe a noise in the end....The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end. But I admit we are not yet loud enough, or anything like it. Research is in progress