

Glimpses of Grace

Very early on a crisp, sunny morning, I walked from my hotel to the University for our May board meeting. I left enough time to grab Starbucks for myself and a friend for the long meetings ahead.

An ancillary benefit of academic board work is the quarterly opportunity to observe the citizens and patterns of an Ivy League town—and what better venue than a Starbucks, a-buzz at this early hour.

The guy ahead of me flashed a rueful smile (did we really want to be up this early?). His dirt-stained denim, steel-toed boots, and muscular T said he was a man of physical labor. *Clearly not one of the college students buzzing around us.* I felt grateful, both for his kind smile (most of the young adults in this Starbucks look through you, with ear buds in and minds elsewhere) and for whatever it was he did after consuming his iced coffee with more whipped cream than I permit myself in a year. *The world needs more people like him who build and fix things—and don't give a hoot about the amount of whipped cream on their coffee.*

As I walked toward campus with coffees in both hands, a tall, white-haired, and

bearded gentleman stood at a bus stop. He wore a hefty book bag with the strap diagonally across his front, donning a well-worn jacket, and shoes that could tell their own stories. The bus stopped, but he said to the driver, *"Hey Dave! I don't need a ride today—it's my last day of classes. Just wanted to say thanks for all the rides, and have a great summer!"* The driver nodded and waved. The gentleman's wizened face was all smiles as he headed toward campus. *Imagining this older student in a classroom of college kids made me smile. I felt privileged to witness the exchange between supplier and customer, and glad that carrying coffee kept me off my iPhone—because, like the students in Starbucks, I would have missed this example of grace.*

I walked on, pondering the patterns we have all fallen into, and how many simple, unnoteworthy, yet inspiring exchanges we miss observing and being part of. Steve Jobs and Apple gave us all a wonderful i-gift . . . but it has forever changed our ways of engaging (or not) with the environment around us.

As we advance in life, perhaps our Next Season's purpose is to slow down, notice,

and engage with our surroundings, and rejoin the story around us. Perhaps we are meant to intentionally transition back to a time where we were deeply integrated with others, things, and situations, undistracted by devices through which we have become servants to text, email, and endless notifications.

One executive said of his first day of retirement: *"Transitioning out of my corporate leadership role was the hardest thing I had ever done. The silence from being off email lists, meeting requests, and phone calls, while welcomed intellectually, was deafening. I could not see beyond my blank calendar and imagined it would remain like this the rest of my life. I felt sick and tense from head to toe, and began to question who I was and what I would do the rest of my life."*

Later, he shared that moving forward from this difficult place came from his eventual decision to be intentional about his time, conversations, and presence with people and places. This is what propelled him back into "the world around him" that he had missed as he lived appointment to appointment, email to email.

As we reinvent ourselves post-retirement, finding ways to repurpose our well-refined vocational muscles, let us not forget the power of simply being with and in the world around us, as both receiver and giver. Grace is everywhere. To notice and enjoy it though, we must be intentional.



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