

Book Review

Three Pieces of Glass: Why We Feel Lonely in a World Mediated by Screens.

By Eric O. Jacobsen. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020. Pp xv + 266. Paper, \$19.99.

How do pieces of glass affect a person's relationships with others? Do they make us lonely? Is there a panacea to loneliness? Jacobsen explores these questions through societal response to three screens in use today - the windshield, the television and the smartphone. All three have impacted the way we live our lives as humans. Yet, he is not concerned about the development of technology, rather the impact of our choices in their use.

Foundational to the author's thesis is the belief that our purpose of life is for communion with one another: To know one another and to be known. As a result, we look for the place(s) where we belong and where we meet with others who know our name. Jacobsen recognises that the cohesive community spirit that affords belonging has been lost in the Western world and posits this is due, in essence, to those three screens. To counter their impact Jacobsen suggests intentional lifestyle changes. He warns that these are not spectator activities.

There is a timeliness to this text, especially in light of the current (2020) Covid-19 global pandemic. Real people are isolated (albeit with different national strategies), and that highlights the lack of communal spaces for meaningful social interaction. Nonetheless, many non-essential workers in pandemic lockdown found community connection when walking in their neighbourhood and meeting the people who live next door. Jacobsen, with foresight, not only identified the issue of isolation - not knowing those amongst whom we live - but he makes suggestions for engagement with the real world: Suggestions he and his family have chosen.

The text is a wake-up call regarding the implications of our tech use. Although Jacobsen identifies the impact of life mediated by screens, he does not negate their benefits. He proposes, instead, intentional engagement on the digital platforms available. He lives in a family context - the birthplace of belonging. The psalmist affirms, in Psalm 68, that "God will place the lonely in families" (NIV), suggesting a way out of the dilemma of isolation.

The author's argument is compelling, scripturally based, and relevant, even if you do not adopt all of Jacobsen's recommendations.

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