

# Editorial: You can't fix the world, but you can love

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I experienced a slice of “normal” this morning. After nearly two years, I was able to be on campus again to volunteer at one of our public elementary schools. “Normal” has never felt so abnormal.

I began volunteering at our local public elementary school while I was a pastor. It was a way to extend the church's and my ministry beyond “the four walls” and into the community. What I didn't know when I started was how much I would come to love it.

When I became the editor of the *Baptist Standard* and my family relocated, I continued volunteering in our new community's elementary school, because I couldn't imagine not doing it. Then, the pandemic happened.

Though our local public school district still is not allowing volunteers on campuses on a regular basis, they do seek volunteers for special events. This morning, I was asked to help students make wish lists for the book fair.

Sounds innocent enough, normal enough.

## Three words

I knew I wouldn't know the youngest students—the preschool and kindergarten children. And they wouldn't know me. So, when those classes arrived at the book fair, everything went as expected.

I also knew I would recognize many of the older children ... and that they wouldn't recognize me. When they arrived at the book fair, it again was just

as expected. That little tinge of sadness—our lost connection—was one-sided.

A kindergartener was excited about the book he wanted and just had to tell me about it. He was equally excited about someone's birthday "this Friday," and "Field Day's on Friday, too."

Field Day.

"Field Day is *this* Friday?" I asked him incredulously.

"Yeah," he said with unflagged excitement.

I had to force myself to keep listening to him, because I kept hearing "Field Day" echo in my head.

The last time I was on that campus caring for students and teachers was ... Field Day ... two years ago.

I expected I'd have to start over building relationships with students and teachers. I didn't expect what those three words—Field Day, Friday—would do to me. But I couldn't let him know.

## **A world apart**

There was another dissonance. Class after class of excited children filed into the book fair, just itching to find a new book, to make a wish list and maybe even take a new book with them if they already had money.

The most popular table was labeled "Game On." As soon as a child found it, he or she would holler a friend's name and "Sonic," "FGTeeV," "Roblox" or "Minecraft." As if every kid in the class had the same name, they *all* ran to the table.

I learned something this morning: If you want to sell

something—*anything*—make a video game or post a YouTube video of it. All the most popular books were printed manifestations of those kids' digital diets. Alas, the better books will languish on the shelf.

In their excitement, the children didn't seem to know what I and the other adults knew. Like "Field Day, Friday," it almost stopped me cold at one point.

The children right in front of me were excited and singularly focused on shiny new books about what they've seen in video games and YouTube videos. The only books they seemed to have any interest in are not much more than sheer entertainment and distraction.

In those same moments, children and their parents a world away ... well, they weren't blissfully shopping a book fair. They were and are experiencing trauma far deeper than "Field Day, Friday" affects me. But we couldn't tell the children in front of us that.

## **What they know**

The children right in front of us know about the pandemic. They've lived it with us. They know our politics and what we think of other people's politics. They know about our racial tension. The vast majority of kids in that elementary school know all too well what it is like to be Black or Hispanic here.

As it turns out, the children right in front of us also know more about Ukraine and Russia than we might think.

A few days ago, a North Texas preteen, without prodding, expressed worry about what is happening in Ukraine and asked if it was going to be World War III. Nothing like an honest question to snap us into focus. "Field Day, Friday" quickly loses its punch.

# What I know

At this point in the editorial, I'm supposed to tie it all together. I'm supposed to tell you what I think about my three encounters and what you should think about them. I'm supposed to come up with the right words.

My fingers won't move on the keyboard.

As if in protest, they retort: "So, what are we supposed to say? The world's on fire. It's a mess. Don't be surprised by this.

"There are no right words right now. The time for right words has passed. Now is the time for right action."

"But I want to fix the world, and I'm paid to use my words to do it," I complain.

"The world is beyond your fixing, and it's not your job, anyway.

"Look at the child right in front of you—a living, breathing image-bearer of God. Look at the teenager, the young adult, the not-so-young adult right in front of you; they, too, are living, breathing image-bearers of God.

"Love them as Jesus told you. This is what you are to do."

Yes, this is what we are to do, wherever we are, each one of us.

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