

Good morning, Isaiah

By Dean Merrill

I've finally figured out why it seems harder and harder to keep a consistent devotional life. Every Christian says, "Oh yes, reading the Word and praying are really important. We all need to maintain these spiritual disciplines."

Yeah, but who's actually doing it?

Many of us tell about godly parents and grandparents who were often seen on their knees at home. We still have their keepsake Bibles with underlined verses and sometimes even tearstains. But us? Well, it's hard to fit everything into our busy lifestyles ...

I've finally figured out the culprit: It's technology. Here's why. Unlike 50 or 100 years ago, I now have machines to wake me up each day with music, the morning news, the weather report and what the Tokyo stock market did overnight. Many hotels have programmable TVs, so I can awaken to *Good Morning, America* or any of its competitors. Noise, talk, information, gossip — cheerily jabbering away the

minute I come to consciousness. Who would have time for the still small voice of God amid all this?

Early last year, my work with the In-

ternational Bible Society took me to Cairo, Egypt. The hotel room had a clock radio, which I set for 6 a.m. But before it got a chance to awaken me, another voice penetrated my sleep starting at 5:15 — the muezzin from the mosque, chanting the Muslim call to prayer.

Irritated, I pulled the covers over my head and tried to go back to sleep. I succeeded — until 5:30, when he was back again. I couldn't understand his Arabic words, but the meaning was unmistakable: *Roll out of bed, kneel down and begin your day with supplication to Allah.*

Again, I dozed. The streets were still quiet, but at 5:45 came another cry — two of them, in fact, from mosques a half mile apart. I threw back the covers and headed for the shower.

Every day it was the same: The entire culture was saying, *The spiritual part of life comes first.* As an American Christian, I was ashamed.

I thought of Jesus: "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35, NIV). He learned that, I suppose, from hearing such Psalms as this: "In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation" (5:3).

He remembered David telling about a hectic life with enemies who "return at evening, snarling like dogs But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble" (59:14,16).

We can dismiss the morning devotional time as a throwback to decades past, even an obligation of

legalism, or we can rediscover its value today. Some people have a harder time jump-starting their bodies and need a drink, a stretching exercise or whatever. But even so, the early stillness is prime time for God. He wants me to "know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught" (Isaiah 50:4). My day thus starts from a foundation of calmness, of perspective, of sanity, of rootedness, which I certainly need once the media blitz cuts loose.

I find that if I use a fairly obnoxious alarm clock, I'm more motivated to sit up and quickly turn it off ... leaving me then to a quiet house in which my thoughts and heart can focus on the Lord. I've discovered something: The weather and traffic and sports reports are given a half hour later, too. I don't really have to know how the Los Angeles Kings did last night in the late game on the West Coast. I can find out a little later, after I have met with the King of kings and read His Book.

Media people can't stand the prospect of "dead air," as they call it; something has to be talking, playing, jabbering every second. Well, you and I do not live in a studio; we don't need to fill every moment with sound. A little silence, especially at day's beginning, is a divine opportunity.

Which would you rather have: the overnight snowfall count in Buffalo or a fresh word from God? ■

Dean Merrill attends Living Springs Worship Centre (Assemblies of God), Colorado Springs, Colo., and is vice president and publisher of International Bible Society.

