

“No Cure for being Human” and Our Best Life Now

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Normally I don't review or recommend a book until I've finished it. But I'm halfway through Kate Bowler's *No Cure For Being Human (and Other Truths I Need to Hear)*, and decided to bring it to your attention now.

Bowler is (or perhaps was) an associate professor of the history of Christianity in North America at Duke Divinity School. As far as I know she is still there. A few years back, she was diagnosed at age 35 with advanced colon and liver cancer and not given long to live. But after about six years of various aggressive treatments, she is still with us. I heard her interviewed on an NPR talk show or read a review of her book, and it sounded intriguing. A sad topic of course, but according to reviews, not only beautifully written but also hilariously funny at times.

And so I bought it and am reading it when I allow myself downtime in the afternoons. At first, after I got into it, I thought I'd put it down because the topic is so sad – and who wants that in a pandemic! When Bowler was diagnosed, she had a small infant and a loving husband and a lot to live for – all threatened to be lost in the face of implacable disease. But I've come back to it, because I think the truths that she reminds us of are worth keeping in mind as we travel our journey. Let me give you a taste of her wisdom.

Modernity is a fever dream promising infinite choices and unlimited progress. We can learn how to be young forever, successful forever, agents of our own perfectibility. ... Women can learn that their better selves can be measured in Weight Watchers points, squeezed into Kim Kardashian's waist trainers, or be enhanced by the right shade of Mary Kay lipstick. Men can ... flip a tire or two at their local CrossFit. The American admiration for bootstrappers and optimists became a capitalist paradise. Everyone is now a televangelist of the gospel of good, better, best. ...

I am taking stock all the time. Are we out of paper towels? Who is getting your mom from the airport? Did you remember your brother's birthday? I have to send this email by 5 p.m. Each day sits in piles, these to be sorted between the things worth remembering and [life's trivia]. But it is much easier to count items than to know what counts. ...

The terrible gift of a terrible illness is that it has, in fact, taught me to live in the moment. Nothing but this day [really] matters: the warmth of this crib, the sound of [my baby's] hysterical giggling. And when I look closely at my life, I realize that I'm not just learning to seize the day. In my finite life, the mundane has begun to sparkle. The things I love – the things I should love – become clearer, brighter. ... I want to be alive until I am not.

Well of course these are all things we know, right? But still, caught up in the mundane – bills, errands, to-do lists – sometimes we forget until someone reminds us. I have even touched on such wisdom in various sermons ... and yet it is so easy for you and me to forget sometimes. As

Bowler says, it's easier for us "to count items than to remember what counts." Family, friends, Church, God's Spirit with us on this road we travel together. Food for thought, dear friends. Food for thought.