

Rambling Ever On Presents: Overrated/Underrated

We're back with more infallible opinions on those things in our culture that are a little too respected and things that need more love.

Ben Plunkett

Overrated – Big Toe

Everyone thinks he's the cool guy on the foot campus because he's this big old Hoss fella and he's the only piggy that actually does any work by going to market. All that is well and good, but he is also the only piggy that gets hurt. You ever think about that? So you're getting up in the middle of the night. Nine times out of ten, you are going to stub a toe and every single one of those times it the big toe and his bulbous ways.

Underrated – Pinky Toe

This is the dude that went wee, wee, wee all the way home. Okay, that does seem pretty lame, but people aren't asking about the context. It's all because all the other toes are so mean and stuff. So really, it all comes down to his sorry family life: His miserable brothers. There's the hifalutin biggest brother, the second eldest who stays at home all day playing video games, the third oldest who always eats all the food, and the pretentious fourth brother who constantly preaches on the many excellences of veganism. All in all, the poor guy has sorry role models and therefore has good reason to wee, wee, wee all time. Bless his heart.

Mike Lytle

Overrated – [Funyuns](#). I am not a fan of these artificial, processed, disgusting things that are made to look like the letter “o”. They are a disgrace to the chip family as well as the onion ring family. It is really hard to bring shame to two different types of food, but Funyuns pull it off easily. The fact that the word “fun” is in their name when they are opposite of fun is the cherry on top of this failure sundae. When most of your main ingredients sound like the names of villains in Harry Potter[2. Ferrous Sulfate would be exhibit A] then you have a problem.

Underrated – **Pork Rinds**. NOW WE ARE TALKING! Sorry about yelling, but I get excited about frying pork skin. They are natural, they are low in carbs, they are a great source of protein, but most importantly they are delicious. Whether you prefer plain, bbq, or hot and spicy, there is a pork rind for you. They are great served fresh at a state or county fair, but they are also great in a bag from your local Walmart or gas station convenience store. Sure they are high in sodium and fat, but most of us need more sodium and fat in our diet anyway so that is not necessarily a negative[3. This is completely false as most of us do NOT need more fat or sodium in our diets.]. In Spanish, they are called chicharrones which makes them sound even more scrumptious.

Gowdy Cannon

Overrated: Deep Dish Pizza from anywhere

Underrated: Frozen \$2.29 Pizza from [Aldi](#)

Oh, do I get made fun of for this in my church in Chicago. But I must keep it ¹⁰⁰ since the movie *Creed* taught me to. For pizza, I prefer a balance of ingredients. Deep dish has far too much sauce, which I assume is the point. The tomato sauce

is a role player on a good pizza to me, not the Allen Iverson of tastes. Hogging the ball.

I can, and have, eaten the big frozen Aldi pizzas five times in a week. They are simple yet thoroughly satisfying. I still remember when they raised the price from \$1.99 to \$2.29 at my local store. I wept for days. Because 30 cents over thousands of pizzas really adds up.

Phill Lytle

Overrated: Candy Corn

In 2016, [USA Today](#) conducted a survey to determine the favorite candy for each state. The people of the great state of Tennessee, my state, picked Candy Corn as their favorite.

Candy Corn.

I don't want to speak ill of my state, but this might be the dumbest thing Tennessee has ever done. Candy Corn is vile. It is a disgrace to candy. It is a disgrace to corn. It is sickly-sweet with the consistency and texture of hardened ear wax.

Underrated: Corn

Corn is the most underrated of all vegetables[1. I realize there is a lot of debate on this point. Some consider corn a vegetable, a fruit, and a grain. Basically, it's the holy trinity of food.]. It is versatile: you can put corn in just about anything and it makes that dish better. Corn on the cob – particularly grilled corn on the cob – is about the tastiest thing in the world. Other great examples of corn usage: Corn Casserole. Cornbread. Corn tortillas. Corn chowder. Cornhole!!!

Corn is king.

Ben Plunkett

Overrated – White Coffee (Overcreamed coffee)

This is what I call cups of creamer/milk with a little bit of coffee added. A lot of people apparently consider this the greatest thing since the invention of goat yoga. I have no problem with milk. I love milk. Milk is good people. But when I drink milk, I drink milk. When I drink coffee, I drink coffee. A wise coffee drinker once told me that you should never trust coffee drinkers who corrupt their coffee. I think there might be something to that.

Underrated – Black Coffee

And that brings me to the underrated king of coffees. It ain't just me, folks. There are dozens of us! Dozens! I'm thinking about starting a Black Coffee Matters movement. I think such a group has potential to make a true difference in the Java world. Who's with me?!

Phill Lytle

Overrated: Sleeping in

Sleeping in was fun when I was 13. Sleeping in stopped being fun when I became a man. Sleeping in is painful now that I am nearly 40. If I sleep in (basically any time after 9:00 AM) I feel like death the rest of the day. Plus, I feel like I wasted a good portion of my day.

Underrated: Naps

Naps were awful when I was a kid. Naps were essential when I was in college. Naps are glorious retreats to the world of slumber now that I am nearly 40! As much as it drives my wife crazy, I am able to take a nap every day at work on my lunch break. As a teacher, she is unable to do that, and so she resents my happiness and sleep.[1. She doesn't resent it. That

was a joke. Or maybe she does resent it a little. I don't know. I'm too relaxed and rested to really notice or care...due to all the naps.]

Mike Lytle

Overrated – Day old sushi. I am going to get very personal with this one. I once ate day old sushi that I purchased at a grocery store. I ate half of it the day I bought it and it was fine. I ate the other half the next day and it was not fine. Or perhaps I should say I was not fine. I have a pretty impressive record of stomach issues during my lifetime. This was especially true when I was younger. The sushi I ate that day messed me up for over a month. Most every topic covered in this article is a matter of personal opinion, but this one is fact – DON'T EAT DAY OLD SUSHI!

Underrated – Day old chili. I love fresh chili. I have had the honor and privilege of being judge/scorekeeper for several chili cook-offs and have tasted hundreds of chili varieties that were entered for competition. I have savored every moment. That being said, there is just something about eating chili the day after (or even a couple days after) it was first prepared. The flavors have more time to coalesce. The spices and seasonings have much needed time to meld with all the other ingredients and produce something truly special. Take your time, don't rush...you will thank me later.

Gowdy Cannon

Overrated: Pronouncing 'gif' with a Hard G

Underrated: Pronouncing 'gif' with a Soft G

“Gift” is an exception to an English pronunciation rule. “Giraffe” is the rule. I’m not even going to argue this. As a Level 1 ESL teacher I already spend way too much time trying to explain why OU has six pronunciations, why “both” and “bother” have completely different O and TH sounds and why “February” and “Wednesday” have the most random, ridiculous silent Rs and Ds (and if you think about it, the second E in Wednesday is silent as well...you can’t make this stuff up). All words we add henceforth need to be consistent. Think of the children! (And the immigrants)

The Five Best Reasons To Go To Peru

Warm hearted welcomes, the ruins of the greatest pre-Columbian Native civilization, sunsets on the beach, mountain hikes, and jungle adventures—these are all great reason to take to trip the heart of Spain’s former Empire in South America. As attractive as these may be, I offer five even better reasons to go to Peru. Because, after all, just about every country has nice people and cool things to see. Only Peru has:

1. Lomo Saltado



This is the nation's signature dish. It's a beef stir-fry with tomatoes and onions, served over garlic rice and crispy fries. Just about anywhere you go, Peruvians know how to season this dish perfectly. It's the perfect fusion of Latin American tastes like cilantro and garlic with soy sauce borrowed from Chinese immigrants. Perhaps even better is Lomo Saltado's cousin Tallarin Saltado, which is basically the same stir-fry mixed with noodles instead of rice and fries.

2. El Chicharron



Like so many words in Latin America Chicharron means something different everywhere you go. In Peru, it is not simply fried pork rinds, but rather the most delicious sandwich you've probably never tasted. It begins with crisping up some slow cooked pork belly, but the outcome is much more meat than fat. You place this bit of magic on a nice French bread roll along with some slices of boiled sweet potato. You have sweet, you have salty-fatty, and now it's time for something bold: **salsa criolla**.



Salsa criolla is a condiment that's ubiquitous in Peru and makes everything taste better. Criolla is thinly sliced red

onion, cilantro, key lime, and some aji (spicy yellow pepper). Make sure whoever serves it to you applies plenty of the salsa on there. These three flavors placed in-between the French bread roll unite to form something truly special. Peruvians eat it for breakfast, which sounds to me like the best way to possibly start your day.

3. Tallarin Verde



The Chinese were not the only immigrant population to make Peru taste better. The Italians brought pesto and Peruvians perfected it. Peruvian pesto is creamy, making genius use of traditional Latin American cheese, queso fresco. You can find generous portions of Tallarin Verde at just about any Menu del Dia restaurant where it is served with a thinly pounded, breaded chicken breast cutlet and salsa criolla. If you are lucky, you may even be able to get an over-easy egg on top to make your pasta sauce even more incredible.

4. Empanadas



Sure, these are not unique to Peru, but Peru does them better than anyone. (I mean, my Peruvian wife does them better than anyone.) Sometimes on the street, you can find some pretty subpar empanadas in Peru, but you don't have to look hard to find a good bakery or sandwich place that makes the empanadas that will change your life. A beautiful little pastry with ground beef, onions, and olive inside. What makes Peruvian empanadas so unique is that they are savory but sprinkled with powdered sugar and garnished with key lime. The result is a great flavor combo that makes a great snack.

5. Anticuchos



One of the best foods in any country is usually grilled meat on a stick. This is certainly true of Peru. Anticuchos are made with beef heart, which has a texture that is a cross between tenderloin and calamari. Peruvian Anticuchos are marinated in vinegar, cumin, garlic, and chilies. They are a tangy and succulent street food that is often served over crisped-up slices of boiled potato. Although just about all Peruvian food boasts bold flavors, Anticuchos are a delicious cut above.

Memories (Part 1)

Memories are indicators, reminding us where we've been, what we've experienced, and the faithfulness of God throughout our lives.

Memories are signposts, pointing us backward for remembrance and reflection so that we can then look forward to God in

faith and anticipation.

Memories are not in and of themselves infallible or “stand alone.” Truth, fact, and reality are all much more important. At the same time, memories are our recollection and impression of those events and realities.

Some memories seem to always be around, just under the surface, easily recalled. Others pop up out the blue, after not having been remembered or thought of for years.

It would be negligent to fail to point out that there are bad memories, awful memories, that constitute nightmares in our lives. These don't bring joy as do good, positive memories, but sometimes we can still learn from them. We can trust the Lord to heal them and to help us learn from them.

Memories can be faulty or false. My memory of Judy's nurse's cap, for example. The first time I went to see her in Missouri in 1970 after we started dating, I arrived at her house, and her dad took me with him to go pick her up. I used to tell people of seeing her come out of the doctor's office where she worked, so pretty with her nurse's cap on. She reminded me that she was not wearing a cap; I was remembering a picture of her in her nurse's garb on a shelf at home. I had conflated the two things and thus had a faulty memory.

Memories can have great value, even if we don't remember everything. While it's great to remember one's salvation experience – and many do in great detail – it is even more important to know that today we are relying on Jesus' finished work on the cross, and are believing in and following him. It's not necessary to remember the date and all the circumstances.

God constantly reminded His people of His mighty workings on their behalf in the past and urged them to go back and recall His faithfulness. (Psalm 78 is a lengthy recall of what God had done in the life of Israel, and how the people still

didn't obey and follow Him.) Psalm 77:11: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old."
(Psalm 103:2)

So, with those foundational observations, some memories "from my personal storehouse." I've selected them as representative, and for their value as teaching experiences. Over time, I hope to do a couple more of these, that cover the years of my life. I'm convinced that memories can have great value as teachers.

1966 (I think that's the year.) "Who Am I?" Sunday morning service at my home church. I was 16. A group of young women, slightly older than me, was singing one Sunday morning, a beautiful song that was very popular during those years. As they sang "who am I that a King would bleed and die for, who am I that He would pray not my will thine for?," [1. Who Am I: Charles "Rusty Goodman" 1965] tears began to flow, and several of the girls totally lost it. In fact, they couldn't continue. The emotion spread throughout the church, as the Holy Spirit ministered to hearts. I think that some people came to the altar. Our pastor, as this went on for several minutes, realized he couldn't preach the sermon he'd prepared, but deftly and with wisdom, began to exhort and encourage the people. A tremendous memory indeed, one of many times when "God showed up" and blessed His people.

1968 Testimonies of enrolling college freshmen. Again, at my church. Again, a Sunday morning. This time, our pastor had asked those of us going off to college in a few weeks (it was early August) to briefly share. I – the shy, inhibited one – was first. All I can say is that I poured out my heart, after spending hours going over what I wanted to say, and a Power greater than mine took over, and my testimony (exhortation) touched hearts in a way I couldn't have imagined. It may have been the first time in my life I had ever thought that God might somehow use me in the ministry as a preacher.

1977 First service in Panama that Judy and I led. John 4 the

Samaritan woman and the living water Jesus gives. We had five people present – the Cáceres family, father, mother, and three teenaged daughters. I was nervous. My Spanish was not all that good, since we had just finished one year of language school, and had arrived in Panama only two months earlier. We put the chairs in a circle. Judy played the piano and led the singing. That was the small beginning of a church plant in Bethania, Panama City – quite a memory, indeed!

1982 Phillip's epiglottitis. I was on a trip to Panama's interior, about two hours from home. Up in Buenos Aires, there was no electricity and no running water. There was no way to keep in touch with Judy and the three boys. When I got home four days later, there was a sign on the door: "Phillip is in the hospital. Don't worry – he's much better. Come as soon as you can."

I rushed over to Paitilla Hospital to find Phillip in a hospital room under an oxygen tent. Judy explained that after I left on my trip, Phill had started running a high fever, and didn't seem to be breathing well; in fact, he was wheezing. After an entire morning of this, she grew very concerned and had a neighbor take him to the clinic for a 2:00 p.m. appointment. (I had the car.) The clinic was full that afternoon, but the receptionist realized Phillip was very sick and moved him to the front. Dr. Vásquez looked at him and said "I don't want to alarm you, but we need to get him in the hospital. I think he has epiglottitis."

In a matter of minutes, the doctor had diagnosed our son with something rather rare in Panama – an infection of the epiglottis – which led to its swelling and producing thick saliva. Phillip was slowly smothering to death. The doctor immediately started two antibiotics and ordered an oxygen tent to help Phillip's breathing. Unknown to Judy at the time, he spent that first night at the hospital, because of his concern, and to be able to monitor Phillip closely.

God was so merciful, and though I came into the picture “after the fact,” my heart is no less grateful to the Lord for sparing our son. Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord our healer.

Memories...we all have them. Let's benefit from them.

Precious Memories how they linger

How they ever flood my soul.

In the stillness of the midnight

Precious sacred scenes unfold. [2. Precious Memories: J.B.F. Wright, 1925]

BREAKING: New App Unveiled To Eradicate Devil Music

A powerhouse consortium including Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Bob Jones University, has unveiled a new app to combat the proliferation of worldly music. The app, “Sacred Fire” ingeniously updates the well-loved tradition of youth groups burning their secular music for a modern, digital age.

“It has become clear, to those of us with eyes to see, that our society is racing to Hell in record time.” Robertson said at the recent unveiling. “We looked for possible causes and the answer was so obvious we were surprised we had not realized it sooner. Once music went digital, with iTunes and the like, churches lost the ability to hold good, old-fashioned CD burnings. We knew that something had to be done. So we got together and we created “Sacred Fire.”

According to the press release for “Sacred Fire”, when

launched, the app appears as a large bonfire on your device's screen. From there, you simply drag and drop the offending songs or albums into the fire and they are removed from your music library forever.

Robertson continued, "We wanted to make sure the process was simple but also with a tactile sense of achievement. Back in the day, when you threw a record, cassette tape, or a CD into the fire, you would see it melt and crack and you could hear it pop. We knew we needed to re-create that as much as possible. Instead of sound effects like crackling and popping, we have added words of encouragement taken directly from the pages of the Bible."

A few examples were given by Robertson during the announcement for these words of encouragement. "For instance, if you were to drop a song like Bon Jovi's 'Living on a Prayer' you would get the basic, 'Praise the Lord!' response, since that song is only moderately offensive." Robertson added. "A song like Beyoncé's 'Sorry' would get a stronger response, possibly 'Well done good and faithful servant.'"

For the most evil and demonic songs, "Sacred Fire" includes the ultimate response to give the user the strongest sense of accomplishment and righteousness. "There are certain songs and artists that are so far beyond the pale that we just had to acknowledge that and reward those holy young believers in their spiritual walk. When you toss a song like Madonna's "Like a Prayer" or Hozier's "Take Me to Church" into the fire, the screen will go black and you will hear weeping and gnashing of teeth. That is extremely satisfying. We believe it is important to communicate how truly evil certain music is. AC/DC's entire catalog gets that response."

The app will be available for download on both IOS and Android devices in the spring of 2018.

REO Pays Tribute: Roy Beem

Our previous tribute articles have been about family members, preachers, teachers, missionaries, and mentors. Most of them were professional ministers for a good portion of their adult lives. We do well to pay tribute to those people that have served in ministry full-time. We would be remiss though if we only focused on those that pastored churches, planted new works around the globe, or taught in college classrooms. Most of us have not done those things. The majority of us are laypeople – serving and working in our local church body while also maintaining full-time employment in the secular world. With that in mind, I could think of no one I wanted to write about more than Roy Beem.

Roy Beem graduated from high school in 1960. After that he served in the military for two years. He was saved after his military service and enrolled at Welch College (FWBBC back then) in 1965. He graduated from Belmont University in 1970 with a teaching degree.

In what was one of the most foundational moments of his life, he visited Cofer's Chapel Free Will Baptist Church in 1967. He found his church home and his future wife on that visit. He married Laura later that year and September 1st would have been their 50th wedding anniversary. (Laura went home to be with the Lord a few years ago.)

Roy was never on staff at the church and he was never a preacher or minister. That did not stop him from serving the Lord in any capacity he could. He was an usher – probably for his entire time at Cofer's. He was a trustee. An assistant Sunday school superintendent. A Sunday school teacher. A nursery worker. He mowed the grass and cleaned the building

for some time as well. Roy was a servant. He worked hard and he worked with joy in all his time at Cofer's.

During those 50 years at Cofer's Chapel, Roy was an inner-city elementary school teacher for 25 of them. After he retired from teaching, he started working at Welch College – where he worked full-time for 11 years and 3 years part-time after that.

My story overlapped with Roy's at Welch, where we worked together for six years. We were both in the Physical Operations Department. (That is a fancy term for the cleaning department. We were janitors.) I started working at Welch immediately after graduating in 2000. For part of that time, we were co-workers. For part of that time, I was his supervisor. (He had no interest in being the supervisor of our department.) During my time as his supervisor, I never once had to worry about Roy getting his work done. I could assign him certain tasks and I would have full confidence he would complete them in exemplary fashion.

But my history with Roy goes back further than that. He was working at Welch when I was a student there. In all my time at the college, I do not believe there was anyone friendlier than Roy Beem. He would make time to talk to anyone and everyone. He would smile, wave, and yell "Howdy!" from across the campus. I would see him with his teenage daughter, after she got out of school for the day, and they would take walks around the campus neighborhood. I saw his love for his kids, spoken visibly and without words.

Our time at Cofer's Chapel intersected for nearly 20 years. In all that time, Roy always stayed busy and active. Recently, he decided to quietly start attending a church closer to where he lives. The drive to Cofer's is too long for him to make every week. He did not want any fuss or anything to be done when he left. While this might not constitute as a "fuss" I hope that my words here will show him that he is greatly appreciated for

his life-long service and example. I loved my time working with Roy, even while I did not love the actual work. I had many great conversations with Roy about any number of topics – books and church music among them. He was a loving husband for nearly 50 years. He is a doting and caring father and a faithful servant of God. He is my friend and I miss seeing him every Sunday where I can hear him say, “Howdy Phill!” I know he is enjoying spending time with his two grandsons and his daughter. I know he will still find ways to stay useful and productive. But the one thing I know more than anything – every church needs their pews to be filled with laypeople like Roy Beem.

Unfiltered Thoughts of a Smartphone Addict

Every 4.3 minutes.

That is how often the average American checks their smartphone while awake[1. Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You*, 16]. I am positive that I am average. And when I use the word “addict,” I am not trying to devalue the word. I just know that people get physiologically attached to their phones[2. www.psychologytoday.com Can-You-Get-Addicted-To-Your-Smartphone?].

We know the stereotypes probably better from images rather than data: people walk down the street and everyone is staring down at their phone instead of noticing things around them...a couple is lying in bed and both are on their phones instead of talking to each other...people take pictures or video of “the

moment” instead of actually experiencing the moment in 3D and real time.

This is me. This is too often my real life.

So in the spirit of brutal honesty but also with an attempt to wrestle with problem-solving and public accountability, I want to write about the smartphone abuse epidemic. I want to write about my personal struggle—the things I think but never say.

First, I feel shame over my smartphone habits.

I was late to the smartphone game, not owning one until 2012. I remember being mesmerized by how I could then watch videos and get on Facebook conveniently and without a big, clunky computer.

And in five short years, I have allowed this small device (with several upgrades) to become a dominant force in my life. I am the kind of person to be in a crowded room and on my phone the whole time. No matter how many times I put it in my pocket, I feel the temptation to reach for it within a few seconds or a few minutes and check it again. I feel slight panic when the battery gets low. Any time I post to Facebook I check it dozens of times the rest of the day to see who has liked or commented.

And this brings me shame. I hate the way it masters me instead of vice-versa.

The problem is not just *how much time* I spend with my phone but *what* I am looking at.

I don't even mean porn. That is something I have struggled with but due to being married and things like Covenant Eyes, I can't say this is the problem.

No, it's when I get on Twitter and find people I disagree with and read about 50 of their tweets because apparently I love being angry. It's when I fall down rabbit holes for a half hour reading inane things, as I did once with Jerry Seinfeld's answers to public questions on a BuzzFeed forum. It's when I watch ten straight Youtube videos of 80s Saturday morning cartoon theme songs.

It all seems harmless, but it is a huge waste of time and my phone's potential. I could be reading edifying articles on culture or practicing Duolingo Polish. Those would be a preferable way to spend 30 minutes[3. Though a little inanity every day keeps me sane.]. Yet I find myself watching the "Bushes of Love" Star Wars video or yelling at celebrities on Twitter far more often.

When I use my smartphone unwisely, my marriage is affected.

Not only do I mean that it takes time away from my wife, but also there are times when I will be on my phone or reading while my wife is away and what I see or read will cause me to be short with her or just generally unaware of her when she comes back.

Based on the last election, I am closer to the political middle than ever. This means people from both extremes annoy me. And as I said, I regularly feed my heart and brain political garbage, like an immature child gorging on potato chips instead of a healthy diet. And when my wife walks in, she can tell immediately that I am not all there. I'm distracted not only when I am on my phone, *but even after I've put it down*. Because I cannot stop thinking about what I was reading. That is messed up.

I have tried to get better but have often failed.

I have read articles on how to stop the addiction. I have heard tons of advice. I've been told to not keep the phone by the bed, to put it away when around people, to set times to check social media and not break those appointed times and many other things. More often than not, just reading the "how to"s has been useless.

One reason I keep failing is because I make the arrogant mistake of trying to dig deeper or use will power. At my church we preach that this is not how God works in helping us overcome temptation, yet I somehow get confused that this is how he works in my bad habits. I have felt this before with lust and other areas.

It's foolishness.

Genuine change in my worldview only comes by the grace of God. And only when I start with this will I see results that matter. "Hungering and thirsting for righteousness" is the posture of a begging person who desperately needs help. Not a strong warrior who overcomes.

My goals must be specific, measurable and practical to bring success.

No two people are the same so this is not advice. It is just an example of how saying "I'm going to get better" is useless. I need a plan. None of this is cutting edge or even extremely sacrificial. They're just small steps that I have taken so far:

1. My wife and I consider all dates to be cell phone free.

This one we have broken, but only when we were both interested in looking something up, like the name of an actor we were talking about.

2. I turn my phone off while at church.

Sadly, I have broken this a few times this year. I do not want to be legalistic, but I personally know Sundays need to be as distraction-free and others-focused as possible.

3. Sundays are a no social media day.

This one is rather new. Maybe I'll make an exception for Mother's Day.

4. I do not use my phone 30 minutes before sleep or within 30 minutes of waking up.

I have read the research that says smartphone usage affects sleep[4. www.sleep.org/articles/Is-Your-Smartphone-Ruining-Your-Sleep?] but I still struggle to eliminate this completely at night. In the morning I have determined that God comes before Facebook.

I want to keep evaluating and changing my smartphone habits.

I doubt I will ever totally eliminate smartphone usage, social media or screen time from my life because I think my ministry and witness are enhanced when I use them wisely. Yet there are many things I could and should do to keep the addiction at bay. I want to look into taking weeks and even whole months away from screens and/or social media. I want to not simply curb smartphone usage but find positive ways to spend that time instead, be it reading more or spending more time with people in conversation. I want to consistently seek God's wisdom in all areas of life, but especially in this area. Because without that I will continue to struggle and feel shame.

I am not and never will be a "5 steps to..." or "3 ways to..." person. I just like to talk about reality and how God collides with it. I want to be transparent, but only inasmuch as God's

grace and transformative power are highlighted. I hope that is what I have done here. If so or if not, we welcome feedback below.

REO Pays Tribute: Tom McCullough

REO maintains a consistent publishing schedule highlighted by the Friday Five each week. Today in lieu of a Friday Five we are respecting the passing of Mr. Tom McCullough by re-sharing our tribute to him from last week. We felt this was our way to honor this man who taught many on our staff while in college and means a great deal to us and countless others around the world.

I majored in Youth Ministry in college. Yet the head of the Missions department at Welch College was a man that impacted me deeply. I only had one class where he was the actual professor, but he was so influential on campus that through a hundred big teaching moments and a thousand small gestures, he altered the trajectory of my life and ministry.

This is not an exaggeration.

Upon my graduation, I decided to do youth ministry in an international city for a home missions church plant. While never in my title, I have felt like a missionary from day one of living here. I find no pride in this. I owe it to the passion Welch College had for biblical missions. The Global Mission Fellowship was extremely active on campus, leading prayer times, community events and spiritual life retreats. Their students were among the brightest and most spiritually mature. Their department was thriving. And Mr. Tom McCullough, who served from 1979 to 1994 as a missionary in France, was the heart of it all.

I could not be at that school and escape the fact that my life should be about God's grace in making Jesus's name great among the nations. I could not know Mr. McCullough and not be disciplined by him.

Additionally, take the following quote from a sermon he preached in Grand Rapids, MI at the National Association of Free Will Baptists in July 2015:

"God is not American or Mexican or Bulgarian or Korean. God is not a Republican. God isn't even a capitalist. God does not salute the American flag (that doesn't mean we shouldn't). God's first language is not English or Spanish. God is not white, brown, or black. God does not play favorites. God is God and he has no political agenda. He cares not about the color of a man's skin, but the condition of his heart. And when by our speech, by our tweets, and by our Facebook entries we show more concern about a political agenda, or we contribute to the racialization of our culture, we are, in effect, limiting access to the Gospel! We do it by alienating those who don't share our political, economical, or social views. And this happens because we've traded the "Pearl of Great Price" – The Kingdom of God – for a scaled down and deformed view of whom and what we think God should value and

favor and what the church should look like politically, socially, or racially... The world is too small for us to stay in our insular, parochial, homogeneous communities."

I am sincere when I say that Mr. McCullough wasn't just a huge reason that I moved to Chicago after graduation. He was instrumental in why eight years after moving here I transitioned from doing youth ministry in my church to being the point person to helping the church become a bilingual church. Even though I was never "his" student in school, my mind was absolutely transformed by his influence. After I preached the sermon at my church nine years ago to cast the vision for bringing English and Spanish speakers together in worship and community, I emailed him to thank him because he was the first person I thought of when God first put the idea in my head.

That was just one of the many times Mr. McCullough and I corresponded after I graduated. A few years ago I was reading *Intentional Integrity* by Dr. Garnett Reid and came across a Mr. McCullough quote from a time of grieving over his late wife: *"God help me not to forget in the dark what I know to be true in the light."* I shared that with my Spanish Sunday School class the next week and it sparked a significant time of teaching, discipleship and sharing in that class. It was emotional and poignant as many of the people were at that time overwhelmed by the darkness. They were so thankful for this quote and expressed it to me through tears where you could see sorrow and joy collide. I emailed Mr. McCullough to let him know. By impacting me, he impacted a church community hundreds of miles away.

Then there was the time I emailed him before I got married two years ago to ask for advice. I had asked about 30-40 couples or individuals about this and he was someone I strongly wanted to hear back from. And he said something that that no one else did that I will never forget. He said, *"When you marry you MUST realize it's not about YOU anymore. It's about the both*

of you, under God's direction. Love her sacrificially, unconditionally. Let her be herself, under God's authority, not what you want to make her into." The first part of that I had heard many times but still needed it. But the last sentence struck me like a sledgehammer. Wanting my wife to be what I want her to be in the picture perfect world in my head has been an issue I have had to work through the last two years. Thank God for Mr. McCullough's wisdom in helping me see it ahead of time. I love him for that.

But beyond the quotes, the advice and the sermons, Mr. McCullough was just a walking evidence for how the Kingdom of God is for the "poor in spirit". He was truly a humble, God-dependent person who considered others more important than himself. When he taught and preached he exuded meekness and did not give off one ounce of arrogance. I never felt he used knowledge as a platform as many educated Christians do. I remember a time he preached about nationalism vs. patriotism and was deeply concerned that he said what he said in a balanced and fair way and expressed this to me and other students afterward. You could see in it his face how much he cared about doing what was right God's Word and by us.

There are thousands of other things that can and have been and will be said about Mr. McCullough and I am thankful for them. There are many who knew him much better than I do, many of whom were his students during his time at Welch. And many have spoken profoundly on his Facebook wall over the years. If you are on that site I encourage you to read them if you can. His imprint has been so strong in my life, I felt it appropriate to add one more. He touched people outside of the normal spheres of influence, including me. And he is worthy of honor in our words, but also in actions that make Jesus's name great among the nations.



The Spoken Unspoken Prayer Request

“I have an unspoken.”

Then why did you just speak it?

The “unspoken” prayer request (pause and meditate on that phrase for a few minutes) has bothered me for years. If I have such a sensitive, secretive topic, then I can pray for it without the announcement that I have one. If I do not think I should share it with a group of people, then I shouldn’t. If it is a request that is burdensome enough to share with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, then I need to say what it is.

I don't have to share all the details to ask for prayer. I can ask my small group (Sunday School class, Life Group, Connection Group, Whatever-Clever-Name-You-Want Group) to pray about a big decision that I have to make. This is not the "unspoken" I am referring to. I am talking about those generic "I have an unspoken" comments. What is their purpose?

I liken this to a child who is supposed to keep a secret. A true secret-keeper will not give others the indication that he or she has knowledge of the secret. But as all parents have experienced, the first time you tell your child a secret, he has to advertise that he knows something that others do not know. This advertisement, this announcement of the secret knowledge, is too revealing. In essence, it is no longer a complete secret once people know that there is one being kept.

So why ask for prayer for an unspoken reason (that's actually not unspoken)?

Could it be pride?

"This is so important, this information I am privy to, that I can't share it with anyone."

"This very personal issue is so private, that I can't tell you about it."

"But that doesn't mean you can't 'pray' about this thing you don't know about. Because God knows."

It's true that God knows. It's also true that none of the rest of us have to know about it. If it is wise to not share about the request, then don't. Sometimes, I think it's good to just be quiet.

Is it really God-honoring to share an unspoken request?

Request sharing should be a time of honesty, authenticity, and brokenness between like-minded, sinning disciples of Christ. Perhaps the sinning saints are hurting because we are

sojourners and living in a hostile world brings trouble. (“In this world you will have trouble,” Jesus warned.) Perhaps the purpose is based in praise, and we see a piece of home here on earth because loving God and loving others will bring blessing. Perhaps we share to adore the One who is redeeming us for a greater purpose. I don’t think unspoken requests accomplish any of these.

Do we see any examples in the Bible of the unspoken request?

Prayers in the Bible are specific: prayers that the gospel would be shared boldly; prayers for protection and safety and holiness; prayers of thankfulness. However, even the prayers recorded in the Bible do not share all the minutia of every request. We are even instructed to avoid wordiness and repetition (Matthew 6:7). Imagine Paul (or Peter or James or John, etc.) writing, “Dear Brothers and Sisters, I have an unspoken.” It seems strange.

These are only three reasons why I see no benefit in sharing unspoken requests: they are often rooted in pride; they do not serve a God-honoring purpose; and there is no biblical precedent.

What do you think? Am I missing something?

Ode to the Grammar Nerd

Sheldon is one lab accident away from being a Super Villian

I don’t know if we can credit the rise of *The Big Bang Theory* for it, or maybe even Ben Wyatt in some small way, but it seems to me that words like “nerd” and “geek” are actually cool these days.

That's a good thing seeing as how it celebrates intelligence instead of disparaging it. Since sports and Seinfeld fandoms do not really qualify as geeks or nerds, I have been wondering if I am a nerd of any stripe. If I'm not there with *Harry Potter*, I'm on a Usain Bolt pace to getting there.

I do know this: I am not a grammar nerd. Just writing for REO these last 19 months has reminded me how much I don't know about the English language. Nathan had to point out to me that "resign" and "re-sign" are two different words once when I wrote about the Chicago Cubs. I don't think you can fail to know that and be a nerd.

But I respect those that are. I celebrate them. While the grammar *nazi* crowd—those that insist on correcting and complaining about all English errors constantly—is a tad over the top to me (we get it, people should use *there*, *their* and *they're* correctly), part of me still admires people who are dedicated to education. And no doubt my own insecurities contribute to the annoyance.

So to celebrate those people I want to write about a few things in the same family of nerd-dom where I perhaps do qualify: the area of linguistics. Between teaching English to adults and learning Spanish and Polish, I have found myself mesmerized by language: syntax, semantics, translation, pronunciation rules, idioms, and a million other aspects.

Other than *Harry Potter*, this is one thing that earns the nerd label that I could talk about for hours. Yet I'll limit myself to less than 1300 words.

I'm not Samming you

Pretend the names "Sam," Rick" and "Ned" are verbs. Pretend they are regular in past tense, with "ed" endings. This would mean these fake verbs would be "Sammed," "Ricked" and "Nedded"

in past tense, following English spelling rules.

Now, pronounce them. Say "Sammed". Then say "Ricked". Then say, "Nedded".

Let me ask you: When you said, "Sammed" how did you pronounce it? Was it like "Samd?" I'm going to guess you did. Now, how did you say "Ricked"? Was it like "Rikt," with a 't' sound at the end? Again, I'll guess so. And finally, how did you say "Nedded"? Did you say it as two syllables, as in "Ned-ed"? Yet again, that is my guess.

Why? Because your English speaking brain knows the rules for "ed" pronunciation even if you are not aware of it. There's a reason you probably didn't say "Ricked" as "Rick-ed" but instead as "Rikt". Your brain knows that when a regular verb ends in the sounds of *k*, *p*, *s*, *x*, *ch* or *sh*, then the '-ed' will sound like 't'. Every time. If the sound before '-ed' is *d* or *t* then the '-ed' will sound like 'ed' like normal[1. What kind of language makes 'ed' sound like 't' anyway?]. And all other sounds give the 'd' sound for '-ed'. To see this in real verbs, say *fixed*, *needed* and *cleaned*. Three distinct '-ed' sounds. Three different rules, depending on the sound before '-ed'. And your brain is so used to them that fake verbs can't throw it off.

I didn't know any of this until I had to teach it to adults.

If Only You Wish

Spanish and Greek both frequently use what is called the subjunctive mood. We have it in English yet I had never heard of it until I started learning Spanish. There are two ways that we use it in English in common speech that I want to mention. First, when we say "if" with a circumstance that is impossible or a fantasy, as in: "If I were you, I would be quiet." Note that we don't say "If I *am* you" and we are not

talking in the past tense. No, we say *were* because it is subjunctive and English in one of the simplest languages in the world when it comes to verb forms. Similarly when we say "I wish": "I wish I had \$1 billion." We don't say, "I wish I *have*".

It's a quirky grammatical construction that we do not use as often as other languages so we are not as aware that it exists. Spanish uses it a lot and I confess I still do not know the rules of its usage and often just go on key words to know when to use it. For example, whereas English says, "I want you to come," Spanish says, "I want that you come" (*Quiero que vengas*) and "come" will be subjunctive (*vengas* instead of *vienes*). Believe me, they corrected me on this the month I spent in Peru in 2007 literally every day. I was ready to be put in a padded room by the end.

It is the same suitcase, right?

Speaking of other languages, I posted something similar on Facebook a while back, but I repeat it here just for the sheer linguistic entertainment value. Look at these translations, English on the left, Polish on the right:

Suitcase = **Walizka**

In the suitcase = **W walizce**

Beside the suitcase = **Obok walizki**

Under the suitcase = **Pod walizką**

I have a suitcase = **Ja mam walizkę**

Five phrases, five different words for "suitcase"! If English is your first language, that is insane. Granted, they all begin the same and it is just the endings that change but that is a lot to remember. EVERY noun is like this in Polish. There are patterns but there are several. And I force it into my English brain like a square peg in a round hole.

Just don't talk like Jar-Jar

But I confess nothing is more fun to me than just messing around with English. I've written before that [part of what I love about the house elves in Harry Potter and Gollum in The Lord of the Rings is how they mess with typical English syntax in humorous ways](#). Yoda is also famous for this, but seeing as how he didn't always speak oddly and when he did it sounded more intelligent instead of less, it wasn't quite as endearing to me.

I'll also add that the use of vocabulary out of the common vernacular scratches me where I itch. In a Season 1 episode of *Lost*, John Locke tells Jack that Ethan "bested" him, instead of "defeated". I loved that so much that when I was in South Carolina for Christmas one year I let my 4-year-old nephew beat me in a race and strongly influenced him to say, "I bested Uncle Gowdy" the rest of the day.

This is surely a small part of the appeal of British entertainment like *Sherlock* and *Doctor Who* in addition to *Harry Potter*. Every time I read or hear someone say "nicked" instead of "stole" or "he got the sack" instead of "he got fired," there is a party in my brain in celebration. One time I had to call London for business and I kept the woman on the line for several needless questions just to keep hearing her talk. I may be messed up.

This hasn't been exclusively about grammar but I thought "Ode to the Language Nerd" didn't have the same ring to it. Nevertheless, I hope it has been entertaining and preferable to charts and lists and posts complaining about English speakers confusing homophones and saying "could of". I would love to hear your favorite aspects of grammar or language or language learning below.

Love at First Sight

I originally wrote this about seven years ago. I meant it then and I mean it now. Usually, we try to not to publish content that is personal but without broader application. After looking over what I wrote years ago, I am struggling to find any lessons for a broader audience. This one is specifically intimate. Still, I hope people can find something in here to appreciate, apply, or discover.

“Why do I fall in love with every woman I see who shows me the least bit of attention?”

Joel Barrish, Jim Carrey’s character in the complicated and amazing film, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, asks himself that very question sitting across the diner from Clementine, the colorful and delightfully free-spirited Kate Winslet. The very idea that you could fall in love like that is silly though, right? It is based on nothing but fleeting glimpses and unrealistic views of romance and love. It does not factor in compatibility, personality, or anything else of a more objective nature. He sees a woman that smiles back at him and he is smitten. Hard. I think many viewers simply wrote Joel and the rest of the film off after that. That’s too bad, because they missed a great movie. I didn’t write off Joel or the film. In fact, that line, heard very early in the film, hooked me. It intrigued me. To explain why this line had this effect on me will probably reveal more about myself than I really care to, but it is unavoidable.

I was hooked because I was Joel Barrish.

Years ago, as a single man, I did not date much. In fact, I only “dated” three women. (I use quotation marks, because I can barely classify two of those as dating relationships – we went out a few times.) Clearly, my dating game was not on point. I was, and still am, shy. If I saw a girl and she showed me any attention at all I could picture us dating. In my mental version of things, I was charming, funny, handsome, and pretty irresistible so the odds were high she would say yes. In real life, I would not even get past pleasantries. I just didn’t want to risk the rejection that might follow. I stayed safe and alone on the outside. All of that changed in the summer of 1996.

I was meeting a college friend for a Cardinals’ baseball game and for some reason still unknown to me, he wanted to meet at the stadium hours before the game started. Summers in St. Louis can get pretty hot, and it was not a comfortable experience, but it did give me the opportunity to meet his friends, one of whom was a beautiful, friendly, Missouri girl who gently forced her way into my heart and mind. It was then that I had my Joel Barrish moment. I didn’t fall in love with every woman I saw that showed me the least bit of attention, but I fell for her.

Hello, I love you. What is your name?

Before you roll your eyes, let me clarify. I didn’t love her in the fullest sense of the word. Love is not simply a romantic feeling, even though that is part of it. Love is a choice. It is a decision. But romance, attraction, chemistry, beliefs, and a myriad of other things play into what “love” ultimately becomes in a relationship. So, while I didn’t fully love her, I was smitten. Hard. I would even say that I loved her based on the limited information I had. I knew then and there that I wanted to spend every waking moment in her presence. I knew I wanted to find out everything I could about her. I knew she was so beautiful that it actually made it hard

to think when I was around her. That is not hyperbole. I was basically a mute around her that first day because she radiated a beauty I could barely handle. I knew she was intelligent and funny, and she had really great taste to be a Cardinals' fan. I knew she was a Christian and she was thinking about coming to Welch College (FWBBC), my college, in the fall. More than once that summer I prayed that God would make that possible.

We parted ways after the game. I thought about her constantly. Unfortunately, I was not the best company that afternoon at the ballpark. I did not feel well and I was frustrated with having to get to the stadium so early. Needless to say, I don't think my dream girl thought about me much.

Remember when I mentioned dating only three women? Well, I was dating one of them when I went to that baseball game. I had just started going out with a girl that worked at the same grocery store where I was employed that summer. She was nice. She really liked me. We were into the same bands and we shared many similar interests. There was only one problem: I could not stop thinking about the girl I met at the baseball game. Immediately after my second date with the grocery store girl, I got home and had one of those pitiful, sentimental daydreams about my future wife – the baseball fan. (That is totally normal, right?) I had spent one afternoon in the same ballpark as her, and that was all it took. She had captured my eyes, my mind, and my heart.

A dream come true.

Shortly thereafter, I ended things with the grocery girl. I was returning to college in Tennessee and didn't think it would be wise to try to keep things going since my heart wasn't really into the relationship anyway. The day I arrived in Nashville is a blur. I remember very little about it and what I do remember is probably not that accurate, because what happened when we arrived at the college was like something out

of a dream. My brother and I pulled in and there she was – my dream girl. She was on her way to the dorm. My heartbeat went into overdrive. Questions raced through my mind: Is she here as a student? Is she here to drop off friends? Does she even remember me? She saw us, stopped, waved, and said hi. She even remembered me! We talked for a few seconds, enough to find out that she was in fact enrolled as a student. *Praise the Maker!* We went our separate ways. She walked to her dorm room oblivious of what her presence had just done to that poor sap in the car. I, on the other hand, could not stop smiling. I promised myself right then and there that I was going to pursue her. In fact, I decided right then and there that, God willing, I would marry this girl. Ridiculous? Absolutely. Romantically hopeless? Certainly. Did I tell my friends and family about my newfound conviction? I am a hopeless romantic but I am not that crazy.

So, what was the end result of all of this? I finally asked her out and she said no. End of story.

Not really. I asked her out. We dated for a year. I truly fell in love with her.

Then she broke up with me. I was crushed. For one, it was a blow to my pride. Secondly, I truly loved her by that time. But most importantly, it rocked my world because I was absolutely convinced that we were going to spend the rest of our lives together. My early romantic dreams had solidified into complete certainty. I spent the next year in a haze. My grades plummeted. My attitude soured. I became cynical and bitter. That is, until I realized that it was out of my hands. If I was supposed to marry this girl, things would eventually work out. As soon as I came to that conclusion I was a much happier person. I was finally able to understand the breakup and moved on. Slowly she moved back into my life. First as a friend. Then gradually, as something more.

A deeper view of love.

Seventeen years ago, I married my dream girl. She has given me the best years of my life. She has blessed me with love and acceptance. She has modeled grace, forgiveness, and spiritual maturity. She has given me three wonderful boys. My life has been richly blessed by having her in it. It is everything I dreamed of and more. My "love at first sight" has become a love of a lifetime.

It is her birthday today. The day we celebrate her life beginning. She will not want any attention, as she prefers to stay behind the scenes as much as possible, so I will end this with a simple "happy birthday."

I love you Amy.