

The New Weight Loss Plan Sweeping the World: The Socialism Diet

Caracas, Venezuela – After years of fine tuning, a paradigm-shattering breakthrough in the weight-loss world appears to have been discovered in Venezuela of all places. While test findings are still in the early stages, researchers behind *The Socialism Diet* © are hopeful. Vincente Montenegro, lead scientist on the project stated, “Based on the data, the efficacy of this diet is overwhelming. I say this with all the hope and excitement I can muster – ‘*The Socialism Diet* is by far the best system we have ever studied.’ If you follow the plan faithfully, you will lose weight. A lot of weight.”

Señor Montenegro’s boasts are not without support. The average Venezuelan has lost nearly 25 pounds on the new diet in the past 12 months, and there appears to be no sign of the dreaded, rebound weight gain. “When you take away food from dieters, it will inevitably lead to weight loss.” adds Montenegro. “And there is no way to cheat on this diet. There is simply no food with which to cheat. It is foolproof!”

Some critics of the new weight-loss system argue that it leaves dieters hungry and fatigued. “That is to be expected in a plan this robust and aggressive,” adds Montenegro. “Fortunately, since this diet is socialist in philosophy, everyone is on the same level dieting field, as it were. We are all hungry together. It is a beautiful picture of a completely equal society.”

The rest of the world will have to wait to see if this groundbreaking system will make it to them. As of today, it is the one and only component of socialism that seems to thrive no matter where it is implemented.

Hat tip to Amanda Prestigiacomio for [her early reporting](#) on this promising new diet.

Five English Absurdities Native Speakers Take For Granted

Perhaps you have seen this before:



Oh yes, even back when Twitter was 140 characters, you could sum up how maddening English can be in one tweet.

But beyond how *ou* doesn't follow any sensible rules for pronunciation, proven by the above example's repetition of *th*

before it and *gh* after it, it only gets worse.

Oh so very much more worse.

As a Level 1 ESL teacher, I have the privilege of introducing the insanity of basic English to about 50 horrified faces each year. I'm quite fascinated by my students' reactions to what I'm about to share with you. But I'm supremely fascinated by the reactions of native English speakers who happen by my class and catch a snippet of a lesson. Their reaction is generally the same: "I never thought about how hard introductory English is before." To be honest, I didn't either.

But now I think about it all the time. So much that I love writing about it. Today I present five everyday aspects of English that drive second language learners crazy that native speakers don't often think about.

1. Negations No Are Easy

If you want to negate a sentence in Spanish, you know what you do? You add the word "no" before the verb. Doesn't matter the tense, the subject, or the verb used, it doesn't get more complicated than that.

Do you know what English does to make negatives?

Well, in present tense we say "don't" for I/you/we/they (I don't go) but we say "doesn't" for he/she/it (He doesn't go). The verb with he/she/it doesn't have an *s* even though the positive does. We say "he goes" yet it's not "he doesn't goes" but rather "he doesn't go". Which is a riot to announce in my class after three weeks of browbeating them that he/she/it adds an *s* to the verb in present tense. Yet, with the verb "to be" we do not say "don't" or "doesn't" but instead "not". And this time it's after the verb, not before. Past tense has a

new negative word—"didn't"—but its the same for everybody and has no alternative form for he/she/it. But we also put the verb form back in a present tense form, meaning we say "I went" as positive and "I didn't go" as negative instead of saying "I didn't went". Verb "to be" still adds the word "not" after the verb. Helping verbs such as "will" and "can" follow the same pattern as verb "to be" by adding the word "not" after the helping verb but before the actual verb. And for nearly all of these, there are two forms: a contracted form and a separated form.

Forming questions involves almost identical issues so no need to rehash that disaster of grammatical verbiage.

2. Hook-ed on P-honics Work-ed for me!

Is there any language in the world that has less consistency in how a word looks and how it sounds? I mean, look at the word *one*. Or *two*. Those are the two most basic numbers and English spells them about as weirdly as possible. We should have spelled "2" something like "xrz&n", just to make it even more outrageous.

Or how about those silent letters? Like the *i* in *business*. Or the first *r* in *February*. Or the *d* in *Wednesday* (and really the second *e* as well). Or *plumber*, *sign*, *wrist*, *Christmas*, *aisle*, *column*, *honest*, *receipt*, and *knowledge*.

It's completely nuts that *ed* sounds like *t* in some verbs, as with the Brian Regan phonics joke above. It's bonkers that *ch* sounds like *k* in *mechanic* and like *sh* in *machine*, neither of which are its regular sound. It's cuckoo that final *-le* in many words (like *candle*, *table*, and *apple*) really sounds like *el* (or *ul*). And it is preposterous that *-tion* sounds like *shun*.

Can you imagine learning the English alphabet and then having

the word *eight* put in front of you? EH-II-GA-HU-TU.

No, silly. It's pronounced AAAAT.

3. English Vowels Behave Like Johnny Manziel

If you have a vowel-consonant-final E pattern, the vowel sound is long, as in the words *save*, *five* and *stove*. Except when it isn't, in words like *have*, *give* and *move*. The diphthong *ea* can be Long E, Short E or Long A, as in *read*, *head* and *great*. (Except when it's none of those, as in the word *create*). There is no way to tell when it will be any of them, as you can see with the words *break* and *breakfast*. Same letters, different sounds. Similar is the *o* in *both* and *bother* (which also changes the sound of *th*). And for the *u* in *student* and *study*. And the *oo* in *food* and *flood*.

The sound of *ei* changes constantly (*weight*, *height*, *either*, *forfeit*), as does *ie* (*field*, *friend*, *science*). The word *tomorrow* has three *o*'s and none of them are the same. The word *women* has an *o* that sounds like an *i*. The word *money* has an *o* that sounds like a Short U. *Who* has an *o* that sounds like a Long U. And the word *business* has a *u* that sounds like an *i*!

Every time I teach this my students have the same look on their faces that I had during the last season of LOST.

4. Objectionable Objects

Have you ever thought about this: We say, "I gave the pen to him" or "I gave him the pen" but we never say "I gave to him the pen" or "I gave the pen him"? Have you ever thought about how we say "Turn the TV off" or "Turn off the TV" but when we replace TV with "it" we do say, "Turn it off" but we do not say "Turn off it".

Trying to teach objects to second language learners makes me want to light myself on fire. I'm kidding. I love it. It's like playing paintball in a *Community* episode.

5. Verbs Gone Wild

Have you ever noticed that we say "**I have** an appointment on Friday" but that we say "**I'm having** a party on Friday" and to use those two verbs tenses backwards sounds weird? Until I taught English I never thought about how odd it is that English speakers say "I got it" when they mean, "I'll get it," as in catching a ball or answering the phone. We use the past tense to communicate the future. What?

Perhaps the most interesting thing about verbs that my students have pointed out is that we add *s* to make nouns plural (usually) but then with verbs we add *s* to a singular form. To the mind of other languages, it's completely backwards that we say "the dog eats" but that "the dogs eat".

We also often have two verbs that translate to one verb in other languages that make it very hard for learners to know the difference. "Do" and "Make" are so similar that they both often translate to *hacer* in Spanish and *robić* in Polish, yet they are almost never used interchangeably in English. We typically don't make homework or do a decision. Nike didn't tell us to "Just make it" and I will never say, "The music does me dance."

The funniest thing that ever happened in my ESL Class was once I was teaching my students the difference between "say" and "tell" because both translate often to the same verb in Spanish, *decir*. And I explained that "tell" will have a person a its first object and "say" won't. It's "Tell you" or "Tell me" but never "Say you" or "Say me". And one of my students belted out, "Say you, say me, say it for always, that's the

way it should be” with perfect ’80s ballad passion. All I could think was that another perfectly good English lesson was ruined by Lionel Ritchie.

I get it: Other languages have similar issues. Just looking at my Polish notes and seeing that there are like 30 different translations of the English word “you,” I’m reminded daily. Yet English is no doubt among the craziest.

Are there things about English you find odd or frustrating? Are other languages you know like this? Share below!

Thank God for the Nashville Predators

First, the bad news.

The world seems all sorts of messed up right now. If you spend any time on social media, or online for that matter, you will encounter examples of people doing horrible things. Everyone seems angry, offended, or worse. Navigating the turbulent waters of modern society is a supremely depressing task. Sure, there are good stories from time to time. And yes, in the

grand scheme of things, many of the loudest complainers, whiners, and antagonizers are in a pathetically small minority, but that doesn't make them any less annoying.

That is why I am so thankful for the Nashville Predators.

Don't roll your eyes. I realize that a hockey team and its success will not fix any real-world problems. And I'm not advocating an escapist mentality. What I do know, though, is that every night the Nashville Predators play is a little better – a little brighter. Win or lose (and let's be honest – it's mostly win) watching the Preds play is an inspiring thing.

Case in point: Last night's game was a clunker for nearly 50 minutes. The Predators were awful in the 2nd period and for half of the 3rd. They were down 3-0, at home, to a good St. Louis Blues team that clearly wanted the win more than our Nashville guys. I watched the game with my two oldest boys, who are 100% die-hard fans at this point. (That is what a deep, magical run in the Stanley Cup Playoffs will do for you.) Even down 3-0, my boys were not going to give up. Even watching the team sleepwalk through the 2nd period didn't cause them to lose interest. This is the Preds we are talking about here and we all know that it doesn't take much to swing the momentum in their favor. Calle Yarnkrok was the momentum swinger last night. His goal at the 9:06 mark was all it took. The home crowd got loud. The team decided it wanted to win the game. So they won the game.

It was awesome.

I realize that this sort of thing is rare in life and as a sports' fan. I completely understand that my favorite teams are not always going to be this good or this exciting to watch – I am a Tennessee Titans' fan after all. But for this moment in time, I am going to savor everything. Every goal. Every win. I am going to watch as many games as possible with my

family and shout at every bad penalty, cheer for every crazy slap shot, and lose my mind at every moment of overtime magic. (Forsberg was the magician last night with his overtime, penalty shot goal.) I am going to watch the Nashville Predators and be grateful. This hockey team doesn't fix all the problems in the world, but they bring a smile to my face and help me end most of my days on a high note. If that is not something to be thankful for, I don't know what is.

The REO Rant: February

February: A Swirling Maelstrom of Despair

I usually consider January the worst month in history, but it is close. It's neck and neck with February. Plus, January is over, so I blew that one. No matter. February is probably just as horrible. It's wet, cold, and completely bland. And January and February love making dark alliances to foster sickness – the everlasting crud. It drains the head, mind, and brain.

Some might say that there is Valentine's Day, that beacon of heart-shaped joy, that holiday of eternal looove. Joy–hah! Love–my foot! Maybe love and joy if you're a seller of flowers or chocolates or pink cards. Because that's all V Day is really, just a big old marketing gimmick. (Okay, fine, I'm good with the chocolate since it heals the soul and keeps Dementors at bay.)

In truth, February is so pathetic and losery a month that it couldn't even work up to as many days as its 11 brothers and sisters. And the number it does have always jumps back and forth from 29 to 28. So not only is it pathetic and losery, it's also incredibly fickle.

Truth be told, pretty sure January has an edge in the race since I am practically drowned in its particular brand of the swirling maelstrom of despair every year. With February, the dark, dirty waters of another maelstrom are all too near, but I usually manage to elude them. Usually. Sometimes, though, I do almost drown in it like the best of 'em. So let's just go ahead and say that both are equally malevolent and dark and pretty much the worst thing ever. I say we abolish them both from the calendar completely. Let us never speak of them again. May it be as if they had never been born. Strike their names from our records. So let it be written. So let it be done.

Calvinist Constantly Using Romans 9 Argument Stunned to Read Verses 30-33

Local Calvinist Ezekiel Owens, after years of pulling out Romans 9 as his invincible weapon in discussions with Arminians, was taken aback today to read the last few verses of the chapter, according to sources.

“Yeah, for years he would get in lengthy discussions about what ‘all’ means in the Bible, but he always knew that if they got bogged down in details that he had a theological bazooka in his hip pocket,” confirmed his neighbor and aunt, Alice. “He was always going on about ‘God has mercy on whom he desires and hardens whom he desires. Who are you to question how or why God saves people?’ Bam! Gun to a knife fight. Now that he’s read Paul clarify by saying God has mercy and hardens based on whoever puts their faith in him, he seems

lost. There's even talk of him looking on Amazon for Arminius' three-volume work. It's that serious."

Ezekiel's old college roommate and unabashed Arminian, Joel, added, "I've been trying for years to use Romans 10:9 and the obvious choice of 'if you confess' to convince him of free will in salvation, but apparently he could not be convinced from chapter 10. Had to be 9."

There have also been rumors of Ezekiel shaving his beard, but as of this writing those rumors are unconfirmed.

Memories (Part 2)

As I continue to recall memories, I should point out that these are selective and representative. There are many more, but these stand out to illustrate the faithfulness of God in both good and bad times. (Read Part One [here](#).)

The Sweet Fellowship of College

"Yesterday, Today, Forever" was a medley of songs popular during my college years at the Free Will Baptist Bible College, [1. Welch College now.] that we dorm students would sing during informal gatherings. One evening, around 1970 or 1971, as the students frequently did, we'd gathered in front of the sliding curtain opening into the dining hall (where the student lounge and later "Common Grounds" were) about five minutes to six, and as was often the case, we started to sing:

Yesterday, Today, Forever Jesus is the same.

All may change, but Jesus never, glory to His name!

Glory to His name, glory to His name.

All may change but Jesus never, glory to His name!

Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.

Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.

Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss

*Walking down streets of purest gold, living in a land where
we'll never grow old.*

Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss

*I like Bible College down here, but Heaven is better than,
Heaven is better than*

Heaven is better than this.

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through

My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.

The angels beckon me to Heaven's golden shore,

And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

More, more about Jesus, more, more about Jesus

*More of His saving fullness see, more of His love who died for
me.*

It's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer

It's me, it's me oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that calls me from
a world of care*

*And bids me at my Father's throne make all my wants and wishes
known.*

*In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found
relief*

*And oft escaped the tempter's snare, by thy return, sweet hour
of prayer.*

With a key word, one song would flow into the next:
name...name, Heaven...Heaven,

This...this, more...more, and prayer...prayer. That particular night, though, as we approached the final song, there seemed to be a holy hush, a sense of God's Spirit. The curtain came open well before the end. The dining hall hostess stood there smiling. She didn't hush our singing and call for someone to ask the blessing right away. Instead, she joined us as we finished out the medley with the the beautiful and poignant "Sweet Hour of Prayer," and then we prayed and went into the dining hall to eat. A beautiful moment, a precious memory, which to me highlights the camaraderie, the sweet fellowship, the closeness of our student body during our unforgettable college years.

First Visit to Cuba

It was the summer of 1986. We had just come home from our second term in Panama to begin stateside assignment. Brother Eugene Waddell, who had recently been named as General Director of Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions, called me, and asked me if I would go with him to Cuba to be his

interpreter/translator. I felt greatly honored to be asked to go. Over the years, we had met a number of our FWB people from Cuba who migrated to Panama en route to the United States. I'd heard so much about the country and the church there. In addition, visits from the US to Cuba were very infrequent, and no one from the Mission office had gone in nearly thirty years.

It was one of the most unforgettable weeks of my life. We were in Pinar del Río, at the site where the seminary had operated for almost 20 years up until the time of the Cuban revolution. Since that time it had been closed, and the government would not allow the seminary to reopen. Eugene Waddell spoke several times during the youth camp we were attending; the FWB Church in Cuba was still permitted to use the facility for camps and conventions. Never have I seen such anointing or heard such pertinent messages as those he brought that week. His messages from the book of Daniel, and how God used this young man and his three friends as witnesses in a foreign, hostile culture, tremendously blessed and encouraged our Cuban brothers and sisters, especially the youth.

We laughed, we cried, we worshipped, and we forged friendships that would last for a lifetime and into eternity. There were also strategic discussions and the working out of a viable strategy for the Mission to again become involved in the life of the Cuban church, but in a healthy way that would honor our brothers and not create unhealthy dependency. What has resulted in Cuba these past 30 years owes much to the wisdom God gave to Bro. Waddell and Bro. Gilberto Díaz, who was president of the Cuban Association.

The 1989 US Invasion of Panama

Things had been hot and chaotic in Panama since 1987, when frequent demonstrations started taking place against the

dictatorship that had ruled the country since October 1968. Then, in early 1988, the U.S. froze Panamanian assets in an effort to force dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega to step down, and charged him with drug trafficking and other illegal activities. Banks closed, and we had difficulty getting money to even buy groceries. Things calmed down a bit, but then in May, 1989, after Noriega had the presidential election annulled when it was evident that the opposing candidate had one, violence erupted, and images of Guillermo Endara and Guillermo "Billy" Ford beaten and bloodied by Noriega's thugs flashed across the television screen. The tension grew almost daily.

Judy shares the following memory:

Since public transportation was so difficult during this time, one afternoon, I decided to take our friend Lola to a bus stop closer to her house so she wouldn't have to wait for hours. We were chatting in the car as we arrived to the area called San Miguelito. Suddenly, we were in the middle of a political demonstration. The traffic was totally stopped. I looked around. There was a river of cars in front of us, behind us and on both sides. The angry mob was shouting, "Kill the Gringos, kill the Gringos." There was no escape. The car had tinted windows, thank the Lord, because one protester approached my car and laid his AK-47 right on the hood and continued to shout! Lola was praying like there was no tomorrow and I was saying a few prayers myself. Just as suddenly as we found ourselves in this horribly frightening situation, it seemed like God parted the Red Sea. That river of cars opened up and I didn't wait to see if the traffic light was red or green. I gunned it and we were out of there safe and sound. Only God could do that!

There were a couple of coup attempts to have Noriega step down, which failed and resulted in Noriega's men being killed. October and November slowly went, the tension growing, and no one knowing what might happen. Noriega shook a machete in the

face of the United States, and declared Panama to be in a state of war. It was now late December, Christmas season, stores crowded with customers and their Christmas merchandise.

December 20, 12:00 a.m.: My family and I – our three boys were there with us, ages 14, 12, and 8 – will never forget “Operation Just Cause.” The bombing, the strong military presence for weeks that followed, the terrible Friday, December 22 following the Wednesday a.m. invasion; a day of looting as people ransacked the stores, including those nearby us, and carried things up the street in front of our house. Everyone was concerned that once the stores were wiped out, looters would start breaking into homes. That night, by common consent, believers set a time to pray and call upon the Lord for His protection. I’ll never forget when the prayer time ended, at that very moment, we heard the first U.S. helicopters passing over the neighborhoods, and heard that a curfew had been instituted! We were able to sleep in peace, in spite of the uncertainty. The next day, we saw the first troops, patrolling the city. Things began to quickly calm down.

Parents’ Home-going

These memories, though separated by over 25 years, have special significance: the passing of our parents, their departing this earth on their Heavenly journey. My dad died in 1981, after a year and a half struggle with pancreatic and liver cancer. He was not quite 70, and I was only 31 when he left us. We are thankful he lived longer than the doctors’ had predicted, and enjoyed several months relatively pain-free. Judy’s mom, Lillian Hovis, left us in 1993, at age 68. She had taken care of Judy’s dad, who had lived in declining health for some time, when she was stricken with pancreatic and liver cancer in 1992. In less than a year, she was gone. That left Judy’s dad, who lived for almost three years after his wife of

46 years was taken. He passed in 1996, at home. My mom suffered from Alzheimer's for more than 8 years, before the Lord took her home in 2007.

These very selective memories, spread over a period of 30 plus years, show God's love, faithfulness, protection, and comfort. From a precious, unforgettable moment of fellowship and camaraderie, to the Holy Spirit's mighty working among believers in Cuba, to God's hand of protection during a time of uncertainty and danger, to His comfort as we said our earthly goodbyes to those we love, He was there!

Can You Recover Lost Sleep? Of Course.

It happens almost weekly these days. Either by reasonable life circumstance or by me just being irresponsible, I will go a night with only four or five hours of sleep. And then the next day I feel like a zombie. I may grab some coffee or I may grab an apple, but more than anything I long for one thing: more sleep.

And some days, that is exactly what I get. It is never right away but I get it eventually, either in the form of a nap or going to bed an hour or two earlier the following night. Or as in the case of a couple of people I know, several extra hours on Friday night/Saturday morning.

When I mention in conversation that I can't wait to catch up on missed sleep, I am often met with a response that is accompanied by the same disdain I have for people when they bash Chic-Fil-A: "What? You can't catch up on lost sleep!" And with the tone of voice I would add the following implied message: "Are you some kind of anti-science idiot?"

I really have never understood this response. Because my counter-response is that I do catch up on sleep. It really is that simple.

I'll spare you the links to articles on this topic. I've read a bunch of them and they typically agree with me in the sense that you can recover sleep *in the short term*, which is really my point. I have never tried to argue that I can recover anything from all of those sleepovers I had as a child in the '80s where we barely slept. I only claim that lost sleep within a day or two, or a week at most, can at times easily be recovered.

But I don't make this claim based on science. To me, it's basic common sense. When I sleep eight hours several nights in a row, I typically wake up refreshed and not longing for sleep (though I may want to stay in bed due to being comfortable, warm and/or lazy). When I get five hours of sleep, I wake up wanting more. And all day I feel it. My body screams that it needs more sleep and if possible I will get it as soon as possible. I often say that if it comes down to reality and common sense vs. science, I'm going with reality. It's why that it may be technically true that snow "makes it warmer," in Chicago quite often it will be 47 degrees one day and the next it will snow and be 27 (which is exactly what happened this week as I type this). On those days, "science" doesn't mean a thing. The snow in my reality made it colder. But this topic isn't even that similar. The science, while unsettled, isn't hardcore against me.

Let me be clear about something else that causes confusion:

When I say I *can* recover lost sleep, this does not mean that I *have to*. There have been many times I have slept 4-5 hours or less and within the next week I could not find a time to get it back and at that point maybe it is lost forever (though I would never argue that there is some hard and fixed point that you can pass where sleep is no longer recoverable).

What happens as a result? I'm not sure. I can only guess. Maybe it makes me more susceptible to illness. Maybe it just makes me crankier than normal. Maybe it means nothing. I don't know. I just know that if I can recover it I will. But life is too complex with ministry, marriage and heavy mental activity to allow it to always be possible. Often the very thing that kept me up all night the previous night will have my brain in such a high gear for several days that trying to nap is useless. I just have to deal with the fatigue and possible long term affects of sleep deprivation.

That's my dos centavos on the subject. What do you think?

REO Gives Thanks

Thanksgiving.

At its best, this is a day to show our gratitude to God for everything He is and everything He has done. It is also an opportunity to reflect on all the little, seemingly insignificant blessings in our lives. Spiritual or mundane. Eternal or earth-bound – we all have so much for which to say “thank you.” We hope that you have a fantastic Thanksgiving

and that you take some time to recognise the Giver of all good things.

Ben Plunkett



Most of the time when you ask someone to say what they are thankful for at Thanksgiving time they will name stuff like God, family, good food, and a warm home. These are very great things to be thankful for and I truly am. However, this Thanksgiving I want to highlight a little something that is usually forgotten: Seasonal changes. That's right. I'm thankful for seasonal changes. It fights mundaneness. Although I don't love all four seasons, some more, all of them have unique things to appreciate.

Fall is easily my favorite, so I love it for all four months. There are so many reasons why I love fall. The colors, the increasing coolness, Thanksgiving, and yada, yada, yada. The list rambles on and on. Plus, some of the best parts of the Lord of the Rings takes place during the fall. (I don't know if that's true. Totally made it up.)

I do appreciate winter though—for a few hours. No, really, I do think there is beauty in trees without any leaves. And the snow, when and if it comes, as annoying and inconvenient as it can get is also beautiful. It does not take me long to tire of winter, though. Most of it is dreary days of scratch-out-your-eyes boredom and stagnancy. Really, I can think of very few things that I really like that come in winter. There's Christmas, of course, which barely comes in winter. That is one of its few saving graces.

The sunniness and greenness and growth of spring is a welcome change. While I don't love it with all of my heart like fall,

I like it a lot. We like to think that spring is a time of sunny wonder when we prance with happy bunnies through fields of red and blue flowers. Yeah, that doesn't happen. Ever. There are taxes, though. We can prance with all those forms and stuff. Anyway, I enjoy spring for approximately three and a half months and then I want fall to be here.

But before we can get to that, we have to get through summer, my second least favorite season. Summer is fine and dandy if you can stay inside the majority of the time. But then you have to go outside doing all this "fun stuff" and you just end up getting all tired and sweaty with mosquito bites and sunburn welts and greasy, disheveled hair. However, I do appreciate this seasonal change as well. I give it six weeks and then fall better be getting here soon or else.

This blurb may make it seem like I am only thankful for fall rather than seasonal change in general, but I really am thankful for all of the seasonal changes. It's all about variety. In Tennessee and in many other parts of the world, all the seasons have defined changes. While I like some of the changes and seasons a lot better than others, I am thankful for the variety of a typical year.

Many of my REO comrades agree with me about fall, by the way, you can see our collective diatribe [here](#).

Phill Lytle



To keep with the spirit of Thanksgiving, I am thankful for times of feasting. While I love food (as is evidenced by my profile picture) this is not really about the food. It's about what happens around a table with friends and loved ones. Some of my favorite memories happened sitting around the table, eating good food, and

spending time with people I care about.

One particular moment that comes to mind was when we had most of the active REO writers and contributors to my house for a Christmas party. It was a beautiful and heart-warming time. I mean that seriously. My heart felt warmed and full by the end of the night. I was as content as I have ever been.

Another memory that will never leave me is a visit to a Japanese conversation partner's host family's home while I was in college. We ate delicious Japanese cuisine, talked, laughed, and then spent the rest of the evening around the fireplace listening to the host father transfix us with story after story.

This Thanksgiving, my family is coming to my house. My parents will be here. My older brother and his family will be here. And my Chinese "daughter" will be here as well. The food will be great – of this I have no doubt. The time spent together, talking, laughing, and feasting on all that God has done in our lives will be even better. I am and always will be thankful for times like that.

Gowdy Cannon



Something out of the way of faith and family that I am very thankful for is fantasy literature. And notably, I am thankful for my wife and REO for influencing me to read several classic works that turned me into a fan. More than TV and movies, a good fantasy book really stirs my heart and mind at the same time.

It goes beyond entertainment to me. I have no doubt I am a better preacher because of fantasy literature. Just this past Sunday I was preaching about how God works in spite of injustice and is going to right all wrongs one day and out of

nowhere I blurted out “Aslan is on the move!” And I appreciated a few people in the crowd nodding and smiling in response.

I also have no doubt reading about humans, dwarves, elves, and hobbits becoming a fellowship has very creatively kept a vision in my mind of what a church can be with ethnic diversity. I would love to have a church filled with English, Spanish and Polish speakers together on a spiritual journey with a common goal. And Tolkien ignites my imagination when I read him.

And then there is just the way my wife and I bond over fantasy literature. We’ve talked about books, watched movies and even taken trips to London and Orlando just because J.K. Rowling wrote a fantasy world, good vs. evil epic.

I’m very thankful for the color that these books add to my life, my marriage, and my ministry.

Debbi Atwood Sexton



I am thankful for Starbucks blonde roast, unsweetened, mellow and soft cold brew coffee.

Years ago, I fell in “like” with iced coffee and since then, I’ve spent countless dollars on little glass bottles of Starbucks frappes. After I realized that I had spent about \$2,751.00 on those little bottles, I tried making it myself!

Not great, but I drank it anyway because of, you know, money. Eventually, I fell off the wagon and started buying the bigger bottles! At this point, I was an addict and figured there was no AA for coffeeholics.

However, God is all-knowing, all-wise, all-seeing and He cares about our life's crises! Someone, somewhere, with the help of the Holy Spirit, no doubt, had the brilliant idea to stock the shelves with Starbucks cold brew that costs under \$5.00 for 6-8 servings!! It has rocked my world. I can now have iced coffee every morning for a fraction of the price of those little bottles of liquid gold. My wallet, my bank account and my husband are extremely happy!!

"The only thing I know for sure about today is coffee. Everything else is just wild speculation." – Nanea Hoffman

In case you didn't know, coffee has a spiritual origin!!

C.O.F.F.E.E

Christ Offers Forgiveness to Everyone Everywhere

We are handling the end of the week a little differently. If you are a regular reader, you know that on Fridays we publish The Five. As today and tomorrow most of us at REO, as well as most of our readers, are busy with friends, family, and loved ones, we have opted to combine our Thanksgiving feature with The Five, except it will not be published on Friday. Instead, we are running it today.

As you may have noticed, there are only four blurbs above. This is where you come in. In the comment section below tell us what you are thankful for. It can be something serious or it can be something as simple, yet life-changing, as indoor plumbing. Without you, this is just The Four that was published on the wrong day, and that would not be cool at all. So, lend a hand, help us out, and make this the greatest REO

article ever!

Happy Thanksgiving!

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.