

I've always enjoyed technology, and in those areas where I'm most interested, I'm probably what is called an "early adopter." While I'm always on the lookout for doodads and apps that can help me work more efficiently, I also watch for doodads that are just cool.

This week, for example, I've found a remarkably intuitive weather widget and an app that lets me schedule texts and create durable text groups so they don't have to be entered/created again and again.

While I'm not a big user of social media (sadly, I really don't care very much about what you may have had for dinner), I do check *Facebook* once or twice a week to see if my kids have posted anything. Nor do I care very much for *Twitter* and its kin. It's a generational thing, I think.



Whatever I may personally think, of course, social media is in the news all the time, and *Twitter* is given a good bit of credit in increasing the potency of political dissent all over the world. I've got young friends and kin who work for *Twitter* and for *Google*, so I do my part to keep them in business. At the same time, we're becoming more aware of some of the hazards of our fixation with constant connectivity.

In a commencement speech last spring at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Katie Couric offered some thoughts on this subject:

Do not be seduced by the false intimacy of social media. Comfort and support can be found in online communities, but they cannot replace the humanity of real ones. . . . I used to tell graduates that no one on their deathbed ever said, "Gee, I wish I had spent more time at the office." The 2015 version of that should be, "*No one on their deathbed ever said, 'Gee, I wish I had spent more time on my iPhone.'*"

We spend so much time these days . . . looking for external validation—with our carefully-crafted *Instagrams*, clever postings, perfect pictures, counting our "likes," "favorites," "followers" and "friends"—that it's easy to avoid the big questions: "Who am I?" "Am I doing the right thing?" "Am I the kind of person I want to be?" This is the kind of honest self-examination that truly fuels personal growth.¹

Corroboration of Couric's point comes from the unusual direction of what psychologists call "a longitudinal study," or a study of human behavior over a long period of time. . . .

"A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away"²—the year was 1937, and the place was Harvard University—researchers began a longitudinal study of 268 apparently healthy and well-adjusted male Harvard students. Originally known as "The Harvard

A long time ago in a galaxy far,
far away. . . .

¹ Quoted in Trevin Wax, "Katie Couric on Gaining Technology and Losing Your Soul," Trevin Wax blog, 6.18.15.

² Kindly tolerate these semi-immortal opening words as another *Star Wars* epic prepares to hit the Big Screen ☺.

Study of Adult Development,” and now known as “The Grant Study,” the research hoped to discover the essential factors that contribute to human well-being and happiness.

For *seventy-five years*, the Grant study has tracked an array of factors, including standard measurable items like physical exercise, cholesterol levels, marital status, the use of alcohol, smoking, education levels, and weight, but also more subjective psychological factors such as how a person employs defense mechanisms to deal with the challenges of life.

For the past forty-five years, the director of the study has been psychiatrist George Vaillant. Someone asked Dr. Vaillant in 2009 what he had learned about human health and happiness from his years of poring over the data on these 268 men. You would expect a complex answer from a Harvard social scientist, but his secret to happiness was breathtakingly simple: **“The only thing that really matters in life are your relationships to other people.”**³

In 2013, Dr. Vaillant’s answer was even more concise: “The seventy-five years and twenty million dollars expended on the Grant Study points . . . to a straightforward five-word conclusion: **Happiness is love. Full stop.**”⁴

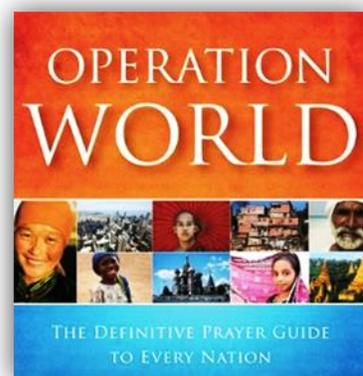
Now let’s take these questions, “Am I doing the right thing?” “Am I the kind of person I want to be?” “Happiness is love.” “The only thing that really matters in life are your relationships to other people,” and take them in a little different direction.

While these questions have bearing in every area of our lives, and while I wholeheartedly affirm our need for durable, faithful, mutual, self-giving love in our primary relationships, I also suggest to you that we are in relationships of some sort with every other person on the planet. As John Donne so famously and accurately penned in 1624,

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were: **any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee.**⁵

As we frequently observe in worship, there are three primary ways in which you and I make a Kingdom Difference in the world-as-it-is: we PRAY; we GIVE; and we GO. Today, I want to suggest an avenue for your praying and one for your giving, both on the global level. Before long, we’ll talk about praying, giving, and going on a local level . . . to Baltimore.

PRAY. A couple of months ago I became aware of a prayer resource that is opening my heart and prayer to the world in new ways every day. It’s a book (also an e-book) called *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every*



³ Joshua Wolf Shenk, “What Makes Us Happy?” *The Atlantic* (June 2009), pp. 36–53.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grant_Study

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/05/thanks-mom/309287>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/11/how-this-harvard-psycholo_n_3727229.html

⁵ *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, and severall steps in my Sicknes*

Nation.⁶ One or more countries are listed every day, with information about the country's geography, economy, peoples, politics, religions, and challenges for Great Commission Praying. I have found it quite effective in expanding the focus of my prayer. You might want to check it out.

GIVE. Second, I expect that we've all been affected by the constant reports of the enormous, continuing, and growing refugee crisis in Europe, especially eastern Europe. And I imagine that you have remembered Jesus' words more than once: *"I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . . Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me"* (Matthew 25:34-40).

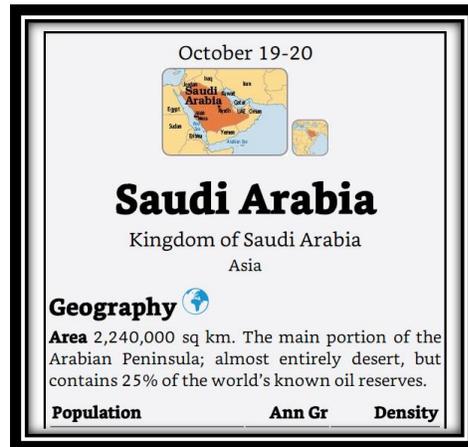
While you and I live thousands of miles from this particular crisis, there are many Baptists "on the ground" in the nations that are receiving these migrants/refugees, and those Baptists are doing what they can to obey Jesus' words. These Baptists are, however, poorly resourced for the most part, and they are limited in their care by the limitations of their resources.

Happily, the Baptist World Alliance, a confederation of 231 member groups literally around the world, and of which we are a part, is helping to augment the resources available to these churches. The BWA's Baptist World Aid provided \$586,000 for disaster relief last year, and another \$366,000 for development grants in more than 20 nations. With respect to the current crisis, the BWA provided \$65,000 to Baptist churches in Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Serbia, and Sweden, last month alone . . . and we're going to help, too.

Our MISSION Team has appropriated \$2,500 for Baptist World Aid, and our ADMIN Team has approved a special MISSION offering on All Saints' Day (November 1), through which your we hope to *at least* double this amount (kindly remember that such gifts are over and above your normal stewardship). *Won't it be a wonderful moment when CBF provides a check for \$5,000 or more to Baptist World Aid for the Baptist churches "on the ground" in eastern Europe?*

As Paul told the Corinthians,
"You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. . . . Others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ"
(2 Corinthians 9:11-13).

Dave



November 1

⁶ http://smile.amazon.com/Operation-World-Definitive-Prayer-Nation/dp/0830857249/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1445367003&sr=8-1&keywords=operation+world+the+definitive+prayer+guide+to+every+nation