

We sometimes say that “fools rush in where angels fear to tread,” which has a lot of truth about it, though it’s not—as you might possibly think—biblical. Having waited nearly three weeks, perhaps I’ve avoided the appearance of haste, but I still have the feeling that I’m about to “rush in where angels fear to tread.”

As I’m quite sure you know, on August 9, Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot to death by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Massive demonstrations followed that event, and Michael was finally

laid to rest yesterday. This tragic event has returned the topics of race relations, police behavior, and firearms regulations to the status of front-burner issues once again. I want to offer a few thoughts about each of those subjects, in reverse order.

With respect to firearms and our “gun culture,” I am not personally opposed to gun ownership by lawful citizens. While I support the general principle of 2nd Amendment protection for private gun ownership, it also seems to me that our nation’s Constitution was written for a nation composed of persons with a functioning moral compass, which diminishing numbers of Americans seem to have today.

There appears to be credible statistical evidence that gun ownership by well-trained citizens who are committed to high standards of public safety through training and licensure has a tendency to decrease criminal activity rather than increasing it.¹ Given the widespread degradation of the moral compass of our culture, it seems to me that finding a way to move toward policies that lead to gun ownership “by well-trained citizens who are committed to high standards of public safety through training and licensure” could make a huge difference in our experience of gun violence. And we in the church could surely do a better job of helping to develop the “internal moral compass” of our nation.

While Michael’s death was not directly related to questions of gun ownership or firearms regulation, what we know so far about that deadly encounter doesn’t sound as though the best practices for the use of deadly force in self-defense were used. And, as many have pointed out in recent days, the police work for us. We don’t work for them.

At the same time, most of us don’t spend all day long every day in potentially life-threatening encounters, as police officers routinely do. Added to the threat of general gun ownership by untrained persons not “committed to high standards of public safety through training and licensure,” the threat of Islamic fanaticism surely makes the emotional atmosphere in which law enforcement officers operate much more volatile.

The terrorist who beheaded James Foley last week was apparently a naturally-born British citizen who had lived and worked freely in that society and who may be presumed to be intending to attempt to return to England to wreak similar havoc there. Civilized governments are struggling mightily with the ramifications of such frightening realities, multiplied by the presence of perhaps thousands of similar citizen-terrorists, even at this moment.

¹ See, for example, the research by economist John Lott, reported in *More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Control Laws* (Studies in Law & Economics, University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Local law enforcement agencies and officers struggle with the tension created by these frightening possibilities on a daily basis; and from time to time, the stress that they—and we—experience in that struggle results in our turning our fear against our own fellow citizens and neighbors, which has been the terrorists' purpose all along.

Better training for all law enforcement personnel is surely needed. There is evidence that equipping law enforcement officers with electroshock weapons such as Tasers provides them with a wider range of response options, which some claim reduces officer injuries by 76%, and may have already saved more than 75,000 lives such as Michael's.²

In this current situation, though, the matter of race relations is likely far more pertinent and more urgent than either gun control or police training and behavior. Ferguson, Missouri is 67% African American, while 94% of Ferguson's police are white. In Ferguson, blacks account for 86% of traffic stops and 93% of arrests following those stops. We have had ample evidence in the past three weeks that the relationship between law enforcement officers in Ferguson and those they serve and are sworn to protect has little to commend it.

In the current issue of *TIME* magazine, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar noted that “To many in America, being a person of color is synonymous with being poor, and being poor is synonymous with being a criminal. And that's how the status quo wants it. Rather than uniting to face the real foe . . . we fall into the trap of turning against one another, expending our energy battling our allies instead of our enemies.

“The middle class has to join the poor and whites have to join African Americans in mass demonstrations, in ousting corrupt politicians, in boycotting exploitative businesses, in passing legislation that promotes economic equality and opportunity and in punishing those who gamble with our financial future. . . . If we don't have a specific agenda—a list of exactly what we want to change and how—we will be gathering over and over again beside the dead bodies of our murdered children, parents and neighbors.”

Alongside those observations, commentator Joe Klein also noted that “Black crime rates are much higher than they were before the civil rights movement. These problems will not be solved simply by the recognition of historic grievances. Absent a truly candid conversation about the culture that emerged from slavery and segregation, they won't be solved at all.”



I'm currently reading a fascinating book on global political strategy³ that suggests that one central dynamic (though certainly not the only driving dynamic) behind Islamic terrorist activity is a pervasive hopelessness that attends the persistent perception that the prosperity enjoyed by the developed world is beyond the reach of young and restless Muslims in much of the developing world. Like terrorist activity, this month's riots and demonstrations have many roots, but one of those roots is surely a similar sense of hopelessness and exclusion among the youth in the cities and towns of our land.

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taser>

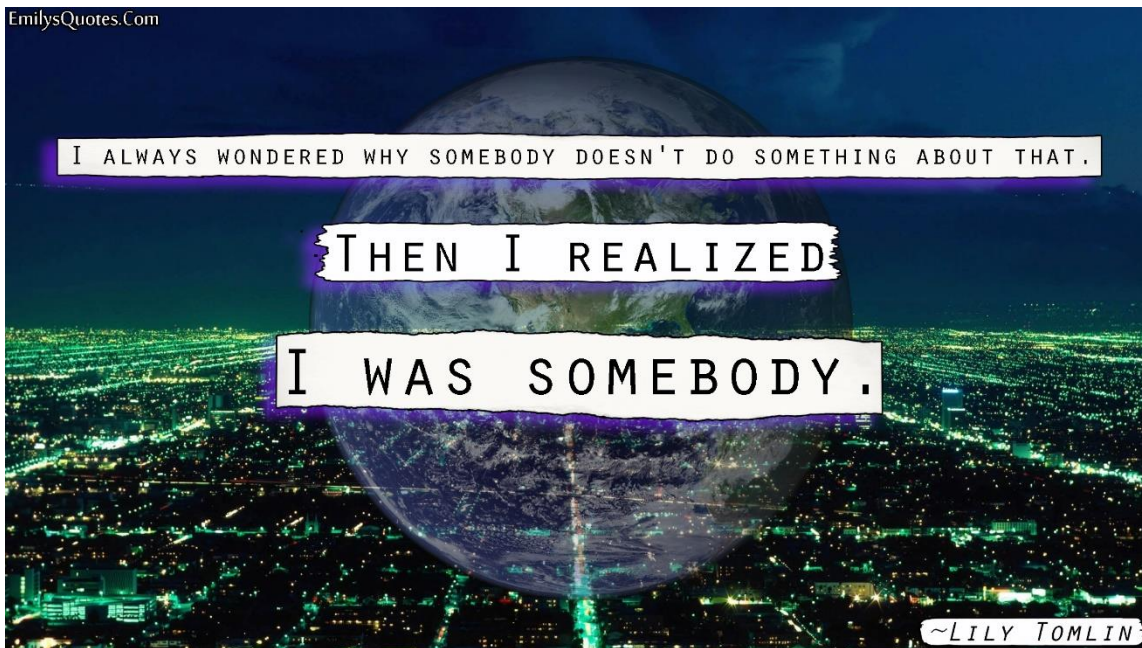
³ Thomas Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War & Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (Penguin, 2005).

While Columbia may be an exception to the norm, Ferguson reminds us—and circumstances in thousands of other towns concur—that “the culture that emerged from slavery and segregation” is by no means a past-tense situation. What kinds of conversations do we really need to have now, and with whom?

What might we at CBF do to make a tangible difference in the conditions of hope or hopelessness that exist in homes right around our church? Shall we simply sing another verse of “Ain’t It Awful,” or will we find ways to share the Hope of racial reconciliation, friendship, respect, partnership, and love that, by God’s grace, has already found us?

What do you think? And what will you DO?

Dave



"If you think you are too small to be effective, you have never been in bed with a mosquito."

- Bette Reese

For other words of wisdom, click on the Quotations tab at:
www.TheGreenSpotlight.com

The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know **O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)**

Week thirty-four: THE SECOND MILE

“Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:41).

The Romans had conquered most of the Mediterranean world. One of the marvels of their conquest was a vast system of super highways that they had built for travel to and from their conquered territories. There were more than fifty thousand miles of these Roman roads throughout the Empire. At each single mile was a stone marker. These mile markers pointed directions, determined the distance to the next town as well as to Rome itself, and warned of dangers that might lie ahead. Hence the common phrase “All roads lead to Rome.”

By law, a Roman citizen or soldier could compel a subject from one of the conquered lands to carry his backpack, or load, for him for one mile, but one mile only. As Jesus was preaching His Sermon on the Mount, I have often wondered if He inserted the reference about the second mile when He saw an object lesson unfolding before Him and His hearers. He said, “*Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.*” Can you imagine the bombshell this must have been as it fell upon the ears of those under Roman occupation who were listening to His sermon? Jesus called upon His hearers to do what was required of them—and then some.

What is it that separates some from others in athletics or education or business or the arts, or in any endeavor? It is their drive to do more than is expected or required. The second mile is a secret to success in life. When focusing on the second mile, many forget there are two miles in play here. The first is a mandated mile; the second is a miracle mile.

THERE IS A MANDATED MILE MOTIVATED BY LAW

The first mile is required of us, and the first mile is always the hardest. Ask the distance runner. The second wind never kicks in on the first mile. The truth is, it is not as easy to enjoy the things we have to do as it is to enjoy the things we want to do.

The first mile interrupts your schedule when you are compelled to perform it. It causes you to swallow your own pride and bear an extra burden. Many try to play leapfrog with Matthew 5:41. That is, they want to enjoy the little extras of the second mile, but they do not want to deal with the requirements of the first mile.

THERE IS A MIRACLE MILE MOTIVATED BY LOVE

The second mile is only made possible by being obedient to the first mile. Someone who journeys on the miracle mile also has a way of lightening the load of those around them. It only takes one second miler in a home to change the entire environment. It only takes one second miler on a team or in the office to do the same. This miracle mile, the second mile, is motivated by the love of Christ.

The second mile is the mile our Lord Himself walked. He knows the road very well. It was love that took Him on the miracle mile to the cross. Oh, He journeyed the first mile. He stepped out of heaven and into human flesh. He walked the mandated mile that was motivated by the law. He kept every detail of the law. But He also went the second mile, motivated by His own love for us. He who made the stars with a spoken word and formed the universe, the One who formed and fashioned us with His own hands, said, “I love you, and I will walk with you.” But we went our own way.

Then He said, “I will go the second mile.” It took Him to the cross where He bore the weight, not of a Roman soldier’s backpack, but of our own sin. And somebody told somebody, and somebody told somebody else, and somebody else told Johnny Keeton, and Johnny Keeton told me when I was seventeen years of age. I am not all I ought to be today, but I have never been the same since that day.