

On August 30th, 2016, I was sitting in chapel as a student of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary listening to astronaut Jeff Williams give a live address to the student body from the International Space Station. By the end of his mission, Williams was on track to set the record for spending more time in space than any other American astronaut in history. Through camera's and a video live stream we were able to hear Williams edify the student body with his experiences in Space. He said, "When I look out the window and I see this, all of the elements are what you would imagine you would see with a creative work by an infinite God. You see the design, you see the beauty, you see the purpose, you see all of those elements, you see order in all the details."

I felt very blessed to be a part of that service. The technology we possess has revolutionized the world we live in, particularly in regards to communication. That morning we were able to have a live conversation with an astronaut in space. This technology has enabled the vast majority of the world's population to be able to communicate with one another at the touch of a button. News media and social media in particular have taken advantage of our ability to communicate, and we can hear about what the Queen of England is having for breakfast before she has even finished it! This is a radically different world from a century ago.

Communication technologies are tools, like a hammer or money or a gun. These tools can be used for good or bad depending on the situation. Though they contribute to much good in our lives, there is something we must guard against in this technological age. I have found that as we have gained the ability to know what is going on in every place at every time, that our vision for loving our neighbor seems to have become distorted.

In the old days news traveled by foot. For example, in 1850, if you lived in New York and picked up a paper one day and read of an earthquake in California, it is likely that the event happened a month before you read of it. Upon reading it, at most, you would send up a few prayers for the place and then you would move on with your day. Unless you had a relative or financial investment in the area, the thought of doing any more would never have entered your mind. That was a far away place, I can't do anything to help those people other than appeal to the Lord.

Today that is not the case. Today while the ground is still shaking there is a Facebook charity drive for those who are in the process of being affected by the earthquake. Your missions pastor at your church is already making phone calls to organize a two week missions trip to the quaking Californian's. You are watching a live graph on the major news networks display the increasing damage and loss. You see two or three people who are your Facebook friends, but who you've never met in person, mark themselves as "safe" from the earthquake on Facebook. Now you feel like you are a part of this disaster and you have to do something! You send money to the Facebook charity drive! You take two weeks off work and sign up for the Church response team mission trip! You are a Christian and you must go love that neighbor 3000 miles away!

However, not even California is the limit, the world is the limit. For a real example, in 2010, I was on the ground in Haiti a month after the earthquake in Port-au-Prince, with a missions team, doing clean up and charity work. Now that trip, I believe, was a good thing, and sending money to California for a theoretical earthquake would be a good thing. What I am leading up to is not that these things are bad, Paul raised money from the Gentile believers for the Jerusalem believers, but sometimes, because of the overwhelming access to information, we can become so fixated on what is happening across the world, that we can forget what is happening across the street from our own home. In Luke 10, Jesus was conversing with a lawyer, and the lawyer asked Him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life? Jesus

told him the first and second greatest commandments, to love God with all your heart, and to love your neighbor as yourself. But then the snarky lawyer asked, “And who is my neighbor?”

In response to this question, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. Most of us know this story well. A man is robbed, beaten, and left for dead. Two men walk past him later, leaving him for dead, a priest and a Levite. However, a third man, a Samaritan stopped and helped him. Jesus then asked, who is the neighbor? To which the lawyer replied, the Samaritan.

*“Love your neighbor,
do your best,
and trust our infinite
God with the rest.”*

Though our technological age has brought many blessing, I believe something that we must guard against is becoming so fixated with the disasters, needs, and tragedies across the globe, that we forget or become unable to stop and help a man on the side of the road right in front of us. The media is so good at getting us whipped up or concerned with something a thousand miles away, that we leave no energy or resources to deal with what is happening one mile away. To be more pointed, technology often has made us good at helping people far away, and bad at

helping people close by. We can know to the penny, the economic loss of an earthquake in India, yet not know that in the apartment across the hall our neighbor lost his job and is struggling. This is something we must get better at.

You are not God. If that’s news to you then I’m sorry to burst your bubble. The Living God is infinite, and you are finite. He has unlimited resources and you don’t. You have limited finances. You have a limited number of hours in the day. You have a limited amount of calories and energy in your body. There is only so much stress you can carry. If you expend all your finite resources on distant causes, and not on the immediate needs right in front of you, then you are doing a poor job of loving your neighbor. Again, that is not to say that it is wrong to labor for national or international causes, there are many good ones. However, it becomes wrong if you neglect the needs right in front of you.

Too often I hear of Christians despairing of the condition of our nation. There is a hopelessness and a sense of helplessness. What can we do with so many things going wrong around us? Whether tragedies, calamities, or politics. There is always something happening, somewhere, that takes our focus and energy and resources. And you know what? There always has been. The world has been full of evil and sin and tragedies since the Fall, it is just that until recently, we didn’t hear about every single incident of it! We must learn to be discerning and use these new tools that God has given us well. We must learn to listen carefully to what is going on in our community, and not expend all of our energy on that which is happening thousands of miles away. Love your neighbor, love the people in front of you. Love well first your closest neighbor, your spouse. Then your family and your church. Then your co-workers and the many who live in your neighborhood and city. If every Christian in every place did this well the impact would be immeasurable. Love your neighbor, do your best, and trust our infinite God with the rest.

Sincerely,

A Plaid Pastor

-by Pastor Josh Emmel, Faith Baptist Church, Kenmare, ND