

...West of 98

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Not much has changed. If you choose to consume news, it is a constant stream of wars, rumors of wars, and all other manner of sadness. There are natural disasters, violence of every kind, and infinite levels of political bickering and general unhappiness. This is as old as humanity. Literally. That original sin got our predecessors expelled from the Garden of Eden and it has been steadily downhill ever since. We have engaged in violence and abuse against Creation, the Creator, and our fellow man. We live in a world rooted in sadness and darkness as a result.

One thing HAS changed and that is the manner in which sadness and darkness are thrust upon us. Throughout much of human history, humans mostly learned about what transpired within their village or region. They periodically learned about larger events that affected them, but this news might be transmitted days or even years after the fact. Today, we are all given a 24/7 fire hose with which to consume every bit of information from across the world and we get it all in real time. We carry it in our pocket or our hand and we put it in our living rooms. This is a terrible and deeply unhealthy arrangement. I have scaled back my news consumption over the last few years, but even still it is too much. I cannot help but scroll social media during major world events and I generally feel disgusted with myself for doing it.

Over the last week, I have been ruminating on a blog post from Brad East, a theology professor at Abilene Christian University. I have read a few of Dr. East's writings at Front Porch Republic and elsewhere and I have always found him insightful. This one poses some hard commentary on social media. It is titled "Quit Social Pornography." It is just as it sounds. Dr. East observes that the "social internet" (described as social media and all its adjacent websites) is just as addictive, just as powerful, just as malformative, just as spiritually depleting, and just as attention-sapping as other forms of pornography.

That is an utterly brutal statement. I do not like to read it, because I have found some rich connections and knowledge via social media, but I also know he is absolutely accurate in the assessment.

This essay will be a two-parter, because I have some solutions for how we personally combat the sadness and darkness within the world. But I think we can start by considering Dr. East's words. There is far too much tragedy in the world, but that is the story of human history, not the 21st century. Our human brains are not physically capable of processing it all in a healthy manner. When we force-feed it to ourselves,



**Honor Roll!** Bronte ISD recently announced their "A" Honor Roll for the first six weeks. The following students were named to the list: 7th grade - Jaycee Gressett, Tatum Ramirez, Bethany Siler; 8th grade - Jaedyn Ayers, Karter Follis, Zandrey Sanchez, Kenzie Schoenfield, Emma Siler (second photo from top); 9th grade - Colton Bilyeu, Holden Davis, Bailey Meyer, Braylie Morris, Zoey Neal, Jackson Robbins, Morgan Sullivan; 10th grade - Hailey Beal, Treyton McCullough, Lawsynn Sanchez, Maddie Schoenfield; 11th grade - Emalyn Bohensky, Tiffany Crisp, Jaxon Morris, Hailey Ross; 12th grade - Ryan Aguirri, Jayton Galvan, Emily Jackson (top photo). Emma Siler (right photo) was also recognized for being the first to memorize the Greenhand Creed.



even with just periodic scrolling of social media, it is harmful in the manner that Dr. East describes. Over the last few years, I have come to realize that I do not need an opinion on every topic in the world. I just don't. I cannot be fully informed on every topic, even if I wanted to be. I have discovered that trying to be half-informed on too many topics leaves me worse off than before. I am becoming more satisfied with being informed on the topics that truly matter to my place and my people. That is enough.

My friend Seth Wieck once published a short discourse from Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh on the difference between provincialism and parochialism.

I find myself seeking parochialism, but I am wary of provincialism. Kavanagh writes, "to be parochial a man needs the right kind of sensitive courage and the right kind of sensitive humility." May we face the world with

that sensitive courage and sensitive humility. It will benefit us immensely.

James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and

the Rural Church and State and West of 98 podcasts. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at [westof98.substack.com](http://westof98.substack.com) and subscribe to him wherever podcasts are found.

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