

Commentary: 3 suggestions for faithful use of digital technology

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Every Sunday morning, Apple releases weekly screen time reports to their users' devices. This is a recent feature as tech companies seek to adjust to the increasing demand and desire for boundaries around the use of technology.

If you're like me, this notification usually goes off while I am in church, and I often wonder what it means for me to interact faithfully with my phone.

When the numbers are consolidated and I see I've given more than a fifth of my day to my screen, I am challenged knowing our time on Earth is precious and finite. Like the Psalmist, I ask God to teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

Cons and pros of digital technology

The research is overwhelming: Our phones and devices are changing us. [NeuLine Health Management](#) reports social media has a vastly detrimental impact on the attention capacity and memory information processing of humans.

In a [study](#) conducted on cell phone addiction and psychological and physiological health of adolescents, the National Library of Medicine found "excessive use of smartphone paired with negative attitude and feeling of anxiety and dependency on gadgets may increase the risk of anxiety and depression" [*sic*].

We are not unaffected.

But is the research an overreaction? Phones allow us to call for help in cases of emergency, to navigate new cities and to work remotely.

With these same devices, people can watch edifying sermons or consume pornography. We can keep in touch with family or curse other humans in the comment section of a social media post.

The endless stream of news and content available to help us allows us to remain informed, yet also desensitizes us to horrors and tragedies. This should not be. The question becomes: How do we engage faithfully with digital technology to experience the benefits while resisting its potential pitfalls?

Three ways to relate to digital technology

The following list invites Christians to think critically about our relationship with technology and its impact on our discipleship with Jesus.

1. Divorce your discipleship and spiritual discipline from screens.

Don't hate me. I'm not trying to kill your streak on your Bible app. Neither am I trying to keep you from the vast resources available to us online. I simply am arguing for us to take our Scripture reading, meditation prompts and other spiritual disciplines and practices offline.

Carry a physical Bible with you. Print off or write down your devotionals. Listen to the audio-only versions of sermons.

The reality is once we are on our devices, we are susceptible to the

onslaught of notifications and distractions. We are tempted to multitask and can stray easily from our original intent of opening our devices. These temptations lure us away from Scripture, sermons and other spiritual practices. So, perhaps it would be beneficial to eliminate it altogether.

Our devices do bring benefits to our discipleship with Jesus, and technology is the cause of increasing accessibility for many around the world. More broadly, technology and screens function as an integral aspect for many within the disability community.

When technology serves as a tool, it can contribute toward human flourishing. I am not calling for a prohibition of technology, but to be honest about how its integration into our spiritual lives may be more harmful than helpful.

2. Consume screen time communally.

One of my New Year's resolutions was to consume only long-form media with at least one other person.

I noticed my access to the unlimited amount of entertainment through streaming services made me feel like I needed to consume content as frequently as possible. As someone who studied cinema and television production, I appreciate the process and art of great storytelling and visually compelling products. However, were we created to consume entertainment endlessly?

Choosing to consume long-form media communally allows us to be more intentional about what we are consuming. You are now positioned to have conversations with those around you, connect with people in real life, and use the movie you just watched as a conversation starter. The media becomes a tool for connection with others instead of a tool for isolation, numbing or replacement.

Consuming long-form media in community highlighted the subtle ways I used media as an escape. When confronted with an insatiable desire to consume more when I am alone, this has been an invitation to invite God to search my heart and reveal my deepest need or the source of my restlessness.

Entertainment is good in its proper place. Consuming it communally allows us to keep it there.

3. Do a digital detox.

When Lent rolls around, we often hear of people deciding to “fast” from social media. The Christian tradition believes in the power of choosing to fast and forsake comfort for deeper connection and awareness of God. According to the Didache, the early church fasted from food every Wednesday.

Perhaps, as modern disciples, we should adopt a consistent rhythm of digital detoxing. This can look like daily limits on when you use your phone or a day when we are device-free. Like weekly or monthly rhythms of fasting or Sabbath, a digital detox rhythm reminds us of our physical existence and our need for God in the present.

Other resources

While these are preliminary considerations, many thoughtful Christian leaders have thought through what it looks like to integrate technology in our worlds faithfully. As you embark on this journey, my hope is you create the realistic boundaries that cause you to awaken further to the movement of God within you and around you.

Below is a list of resources to help spark your reconsideration of your relationship to digital technology:

- *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* by Andy Crouch.
- [Device and Virtue Podcast](#).
- *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* by David Kinnaman, Mark Matlock and Aly Hawkins.
- *Always On: Practicing Faith in a New Media Landscape* by Angela Williams Gorrell.

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