

Voices: Taking back our selves from our soul-stealing (de)vices

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In 2005, I was moving a mattress up three flights of narrow stairs to an international student's apartment. "Helping" me was one of our American students. I put "helping" in quotes, because he held his end of the mattress with one hand and his phone with the other hand, texting the entire time.



Eric BlackI couldn't understand texting and was pretty annoyed by his divided attention, especially given the precariousness of our situation. Exasperated, I asked, "How much do you text in a day?" He replied coolly: "I don't know. I probably send several hundred a day."

What? And one-handed at that!

Less than 10 years later, I joined the smart-phone revolution, which sounds funny in 2016. Revolution? What rock had I been living under? I broke down and plugged in because more and more of our church members were texting me. I also wanted a more streamlined way to keep track of expenses, sermon research and other work-related things, and a smart phone made that possible.

What I didn't know when I was on the outside looking in was what effect plugging in would have on me. Over the last couple of years, I have

watched as the promise of connection to others became connection to “it.”

What “it” does



“It”—my phone and all the things my phone can do—captured my eyes first, my mind second and then my soul.

And not only my eyes, mind and soul. “It” is taking my children, too.

I recently listened to a parent describe the wonderful spirit of her son, his care for others and his natural ability to be a friend. I listened as she described the complete shift in his personality once he plugged in to a couple of popular games he plays on a phone or tablet. Most disturbing for her is how he responds when she must pull him away. He resists and wails and curls up until he begins thinking of how to get more screen time.

Like an addict looking for another hit.

Our children are not the only ones jonesing for another hit of pure backlit bliss. We are, too. We’re in this shape because our biochemical selves are being rewired to need more mobile stimulation.

Mobile devices and game systems “affect the brain’s frontal cortex—which controls ... impulse control—in exactly the same way that cocaine does,” psychiatrist Nicholas Kardaras said in the [New York Post](#). Chemically, such stimulation raises dopamine in the nervous system to an addictive level. Other researchers report the same findings, which a simple online search demonstrates.

So, what to do?

None of us wants our children to grow up addicted. At the same time, none of us wants our children to fall behind their peers or society. Staying current on technology seems like a necessary evil. Yet how do we stay current while protecting our children?

During an interview aired on PBS, filmmaker/researcher Delaney Ruston asks the question: “What should the rules be? Because we don’t have any right now.”

As a person of faith, I think we do have a rule. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (My quote squeezes the original Deuteronomic source with Jesus’ quote in Matthew.) This rule applies to all of us, regardless of age.

If we are to love the Lord our God with our physical being—which is not the literal meaning of “heart” or “strength” but is supported by the Apostle Paul in his teaching that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit—then we must take notice of the current biochemical research on screen time.

Take time to unplug

If screens are negatively affecting our God-given ability and call to connect with other human beings in a God-honoring way, then we need to unplug. Technology is not worth abdicating our stewardship of what God has given us in our bodies and the relation of our bodies with other bodies.

If we are to love the Lord our God with our mind and soul, which is the spiritual part of who we are, then we must recognize the co-opting of our souls by the things of this world. We must acknowledge how they diminish our God-given abilities, replacing them with temporary stimulation. We must take back our time, our minds and our souls, giving them to God for God’s purposes.

I have deleted all game apps from my phone. I am limiting my Facebook,

Instagram and Twitter activity to a block of time between 8 a.m. and noon with the intent of limiting it further in the near future. I am also re-engaging a weekly Internet fast during which I do not interact online for an entire day.

I am taking these steps for myself and also to lead the way for my children into a future free of dependence on the stuff of earth and filled instead with hunger for the things of God.

[If you unplug, why and how?](#)

Eric Black is pastor of First Baptist Church in Covington, Texas, and a member of the Baptist Standard Publishing board of directors.