

## Digital Detox: Facing our Crisis, Colossians 2:6-8, 9/8/24

Pull out your phone and turn on your flashlight...if you don't know how just ask somebody next to you they'll know...just put it in your lap so we can't see it and here's what we're going to do we're going to do a little survey in the room.

1. if you prefer a text any day over an actual phone
2. if you've ever gotten in bed picked up your phone to do one quick thing and wondered where 30 minutes went
3. if you've ever read texts or texted or checked social media while driving
4. if you've ever spent more time documenting an experience with your phone than being fully present in it
5. if you've disengaged from an in-person conversation because of the distraction of your phone.
6. if you experience separation anxiety when you accidentally leave your phone at home, or don't have service.
7. If you've ever faked being on your phone to avoid a conversation or a person
8. if whenever your phone buzzes, beeps or rings do you feel you an obligation to look at it regardless of what you are doing at the time?
9. if the subject of your phone usage/addiction has been a topic of conversation or argument in your household?
10. If you would be a bit embarrassed to show people your average screen time
11. if you have a love/hate relationship with your screens.

Now let me just say at the top, I'm not anti-technology (I have an iPhone, Mac, iPad we use lots of digital technology as a church). I like having a weather app, access to information like you. I'm not saying we should all become Amish... but I do believe our screens present a real threat to our resilient discipleship to Jesus- particularly what I see as a lack of discernment in what we do and see on our screens, and over-dependence on digital technology.

And so let me frame our goal for this mini-series with a quote from Andy Crouch's book *The Tech-Wise Family*. Andy is one of the foremost Christian thinkers on technology, and he has helped me immensely not only in my research for this series, but in how I have built guardrails for technology in my life practically. I'm thrilled to announce that Andy and his daughter Amy will be joining us on September 29. Session with the students, Preaching and then 3pm A Conversation: Building a Tech-Wise Life.

Here's what Andy says, "The world is nudging us for our attention and in a direction all the time. When we are line at the grocery store and all the candy and magazines are in the checkout line, why do you think they put all the junk there? It's a nudge. The makers of our technological devices have become absolute masters at the nudge. Every notification that comes in on your smartphone is a nudge. Something that makes it easier to stop whatever you're currently doing and divert your attention to your screen. Increasingly sophisticated algorithms help apps manage the number of nudges, so you never get tired of responding to them. The mere

presence of your smartphone in your pocket is a nudge. You are just a tap away from countless rewards of information, entertainment, and distraction. **The question is whether those nudges are leading us to the life we actually want."**

In other words our screens are discipling us...and the nudge, the current will take us to more integration, more dependence, more distraction, not less. This series is a big nudge in the opposite direction of the current, to put our paddles in the down into the rocks...whoa hold on. Is this the kind of life I want? What is our digital technology is doing to us, what does Jesus want for me? And then to make "redemptive moves" as Andy calls them, decisions that retrain our habits, set guardrails, so we can put our screens in their proper place and experience the relationally connected, embodied and present life Jesus intended and called us to. **We want to learn how to let our devices sleep so we can be fully awake to our life with God and others.** The first two messages are about building our spiritual discernment, taking a critical look under the hood of our digital technology and evaluating what technology and how much of it we really want and ought to have in our lives and our families. The last two messages will be focused on making redemptive moves to be fully awake to our life with God and others. Today our message is called **Facing our Crisis**

Neil Postman, author of *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, written 40 years ago spoke prophetically about our digital age. **"Technology must never be accepted as the natural order of things. Every technology is a product...that carries with it a program, agenda and philosophy that may or may not be life enhancing and therefore requires scrutiny, criticism and control.**

**We need to cultivate a healthy suspicion of technology."** What's behind it? What's its worldview? Agenda? Promises that it is selling?

Let's ask this question from a Biblical perspective. The apostle Paul 2000 years ago warned the church in Colossae to have the same healthy suspicion of the popular philosophies of their day and culture. **Colossians 2: 6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.**

**8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.**

Amazing things were happening in the church in Colossae. People would be introduced to Jesus, what he did, trust in him and begin seeing their lives transformed as they were taught and they were experiencing the church community. Amazing! However, there were some in the community and in the church that were buying into this new shiny thing called Gnosticism. It was a belief that the gospel of Jesus was good but it was just the training wheels, it just a piece of the good life. There was elevated, secret knowledge to be obtained through certain practices, rituals, traditions. Higher levels to enlightenment. And some in the church were being taken captive by it. Paul called this Gnosticism **"hollow and deceptive philosophy"- it's a set of beliefs**

and practices that promise to deliver the life you've always wanted but is ultimately misleading and empty. And underneath the hood of Gnosticism of what seemed advanced and promising was actually "human tradition and elemental spiritual forces" In other words- a dangerous mix of human and demonic schemes. Look under the hood.

What happens if we stop to look under the hood of some of our digital technology, apps, social media? What is their agenda? What promises are they making and at what cost to my life, privacy, my attention? My contention is that we will find the same kinds of ancient hollow and deceptive philosophies at work. Let me show you what I mean.

In 2017, Sean Parker sat down with Axios news network for an interview, he was the first president of Facebook, he's the character played by Justin Timberlake in the movie Social Network if you saw it. But now he calls himself a conscientious objector to social media. He says this about the social media empire he helped build. "God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains. The thought process that went into creating these applications, Facebook being the first of them, was always built on the thought,

'How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible.'

And that means we need to give you sort of a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever. And that would get you to contribute more content. And that's going to get you more likes and comments.

It's a social validation feedback loop. Exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with...because you are exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology."<sup>1</sup>

What a revealing question, "How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?" I wonder if they are succeeding...

- The average iPhone user touches their phone 2617x a day.
- We check our phones 144 times a day,
- And spend an average of 5 1/5 hours a day of screen time, going up with each generation.
- 89% of Americans check their phones within the first 10 minutes of waking up.
- Children spend 52% more time staring at screens than before the pandemic.
- Barna Research found that in a recent survey of how Americans use their phones 42% waste time, 40% distracted, 25% separate me from others, 21% lower attention span.<sup>2</sup>
- 57% of Americans consider themselves addicted to their smartphones.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.axios.com/2017/12/15/sean-parker-unloads-on-facebook-god-only-knows-what-its-doing-to-our-childrens-brains-1513306792>

<sup>2</sup> Andy Crouch, The Tech-Wise Family, p.96

<sup>3</sup> [www.reviews.org/mobile/cell-phone-addiction](http://www.reviews.org/mobile/cell-phone-addiction)

Take a look at [this picture \[Slide\]](#). I know sometimes in my life I feel like as I am laying hold of my phone somehow it's laying hold of me.

Two-thirds of American adults agree that periodically unplugging or taking a digital detox would be good for their mental health and yet barely a quarter of those people have actually done so themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Tristan Harris in the Atlantic, started out as a design ethicist and philosopher for google... a real thing. But grew disenfranchised by the tech industry. Because he saw that every piece of social technology today is intentionally designed and engineered for distraction and addiction. Because that is where the money is.<sup>5</sup>

Author and form dot com executive, Seth Godin- "Your phone doesn't work for you. It works for Apple or Google. We want to believe that we are the customer, but that's not the business model. We are the product. And what is being sold is both our data and privacy, but also our attention. That's how they make money."<sup>6</sup>

Researchers and tech designers have found something even more troubling in recent years. Negative emotions like anger and sadness can also keep us addicted to social media platforms.<sup>7</sup> The news has always had a saying, "If it bleeds it leads." Because we are drawn to things that shock us, anger us, divide us, enrage us, makes us want revenge. Have you noticed what comes up in your feed?

So, what is the philosophy behind much of our apps, social media, video games and smartphones? I would argue that it's make all kinds of promises to make our lives better, more comfortable, easier, more connected- get us as addicted as possible, turn us into commodities- selling our privacy and attention, and maximize their profit at our collective expense. Now I realize that sounds grumpy and regressive.

But I'm not asking us to have a phone burning session after service. I'm asking us to consider what Paul said- don't be taken captive. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. long before the advent of the social media said, "The great temptation of life and the great tragedy of life is that so often we allow the without of our lives to absorb the within of our lives. We have allowed our civilization to outrun our culture.

We have allowed our technology to outdistance our theology. And for this reason we find ourselves caught up with many problems."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Darren Patrick, <https://cotc.com/messages/digital-rule-of-life/>

<sup>5</sup> As quoted by John Mark Comer in <https://bridgetown.church/teachings/unhurrying-with-a-rule-of-life/the-case-for-a-digital-asceticism>  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5IF81CJWfM>

<sup>7</sup> Darren Patrick, The Digital Fast, p.34

<sup>8</sup> As Quoted by John Mark Comer, <https://bridgetown.church/teachings/unhurrying-with-a-rule-of-life/the-case-for-a-digital-asceticism>

So what do we do? How do we begin to be more discerning and how do we put our screens and technology in their proper place? We want to make this series as practical as possible. Remember our goal- **We want to learn how to let our devices sleep so we can be fully awake to our life with God and others.** So each week we are going to give you a relational challenge and a digital challenge.

**Relational Challenge:** Assess the quality of your relationship with God, family and church. How much time do you spend developing these relationships? What changes do you want to make? Come to church picnic next week, small group fair in two weeks.

**Digital Challenge:** Assessment- This week- **spy on your screen activity** (computer, Phone, Pad, TV, music, podcasts, video games, etc.). Take notice of why you go to a screen. Take notice of how much time you spend on a screen. Ask yourself, why? What need/desire is this filling in my life? Is it delivering on what it promised? Where can you instead find life in relationships with God and others that we were made for?

Now let me prepare you, starting next Sunday after the sermon I am going to call us to a **digital fast** for one week. We made cards with instructions, webpage with all kinds of helpful ways to do that. Much more on that next week. This week in enews I wrote an article about what fasting is and why we do it.