

Digital Detox, The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, John 10:10, 9/15/24

"If you wanted to invent a device that could rewire our minds, if you wanted to create a society of people who are perpetually distracted, isolated and overtired, if you wanted to weaken our memories and damage our capacity for focus and deep thought,

if you wanted to reduce empathy, encourage self-absorption, and redraw the lines of social etiquette, you'd likely end up with a smartphone." - How to Break up with your phone- Catherine Price Welcome to Digital Detox week 2!

Now to some of us, that sounds like fighting words. Some of us might be gripping our phones wondering if the ushers are about to come down the aisles to collect them. As I joked last week, we aren't going burn all our phones at the church picnic today. [Title Slide] While I'm not anti-technology (I have an iPhone, Mac, iPad we use lots of digital technology as a church) I have a strong core conviction that our screens present a real threat to our resilient discipleship to Jesus, and the abundant life that Jesus intended for us, particularly what I see as a lack of discernment in what we do and see on our screens, and over-dependence on digital technology.

Many of us find ourselves a digital current going wherever the current takes us. So really what this series is all about jamming our oars into the rocks for a moment and say, "Do I want to be in this current? Are my screen habits healthy for me and my family? What am I becoming and what does Jesus want for me?" I'd like to start with a confession. I don't feel great about my relationship with my phone. I think I'm better than I used to be, but I'm on it more than I should be and it has a greater presence in my home life than I want it to have. This journey to putting digital technology in its proper place in my life really began out of Holy Spirit intervention. Like most of us, I was using my phone as my alarm clock. And what started to happen was my phone would wake me up, and I would turn over and pick it up, and notice a few emails, texts, had come in, and just couldn't help myself, I would open it and with one eye squinting at my glowing screen, barely awake this is how I would begin my day already engaging my brain with work tasks, not a great way to start your day. And even though I woke up early and set aside my first hour of my day for my relationship with God, what I was finding is that my phone was getting the first 30 minutes. And one day on a prayer walk...without my phone...I was deeply convicted by the Spirit who could finally get a word in, "We need to talk about your phone." I had to make the stick my oar in the water and say enough is enough. I'm going to let me phone keep sleeping so I can be fully awake with God in the morning. I want this for you. Our goal for this series: We want to learn how to let our devices sleep so we can be fully awake to our life with God and others.

Let me remind us that we're calling for a weeklong Digital Fast starting sundown today until sun-up on Sunday next week. As a way of hitting the pause button so you can make some room to examine your relationships with your screens. If you are skeptical about joining us, at least keep an open mind until the end of the sermon, and I will give you instructions how to do this.

John 10:10 *The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.*

Jesus is telling us that there is a spiritual enemy of our soul, Jesus calls him a thief. We don't even recognize him, He's a wolf in sheep's clothing. To put this verse in it's original context, Jesus says I am the good shepherd, one of the seven I am statements in John. I have come to give you life, to guide you to green pastures. And my sheep hear my voice. And here it's a voice of warning. Jesus gives us the playbook of the enemy here in three words: steal, kill and destroy. Today, here's our main idea: **We have a spiritual enemy and he's highly invested in technology.** I'd like to consider how the enemy's playbook is lived out in our digital age.

To Steal- Klepto- In Greco-Roman culture of Jesus' day, this word was used to describe stealing in such a strategic, clever and subtle way that the victim doesn't even know something has been stolen. In Greek mythology the gods who would steal were praised and celebrated for their skill in stealing things.¹

See the first scheme of the enemy is to steal life from us in such a way that you don't even notice when it is gone. He's highly invested in our screens to accomplish this. One of the false promises that digital technology has made from the beginning is that it will give us time back, we will be able to do everything faster, get information more quickly, and that way you will have more time for important things in life, a better work-life balance...how's that going? Are we working less? Average work week has been steadily on the rise since we put the iPhone in our hands. We experience the feeling that we are always on, always accessible, with a low-level anxiety and expectation that we must respond at all times.

The enemy wants to steal the two precious **resources we have: our time and our attention.** We looked at this last week, remember the quote from the first president of Facebook, Sean Parker, who said that social media was engineered with the thought, **How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?**

[Title Slide] 10:30 service Only...I'd imagine most of us know the experience of scrolling mindlessly through Youtube or Instagram Reels and suddenly you are in a time vortex? This is what mine looks like, and ours are all different because the algorithm knows you. I pop on to Youtube and watch someone cutting open an exotic fruit I've never seen before, and then I scroll to a guy in one of those wingsuits flying down the mountain that's pretty cool, then a science experiment with Mentos and a coke bottle, then out of nowhere (and because the algorithm knows that 40 something married men are the most likely age to have an affair) there is an ad for girls that apparently can't wait to meet me, so I scroll past that, and then it suggests a video about how Trump left Harris speechless, and then a scene from Seinfeld, then there's an ad for a workout routine that promises to make me look like a Greek god, then a video of Joe Rogan shooting at Elon Musk's Cybertruck, and a dolphin giving kisses to a baby... and then I look up and 37 minutes has just flown by. It almost seems like that's what they wanted that to

¹ From Darren Patrick sermon, <https://cotc.com/messages/the-price-of-your-device>

happen. And it seems that way because they are design to do that. YouTube and social media platforms literally took their design schemes from slot machines in the casinos.

Not only has the enemy weaponized our technology to steal time but even more tragically our capacity to pay attention to anything that isn't immediately excited, entertaining, shiny and short. Very few of us now have the power of sustained attention in fact our attention span is dropping with each passing year. Half of you didn't hear that because I lost your attention. And this is a grave threat to our discipleship to Jesus. **Attention is the portal to our spiritual formation.** Spiritual form, discipleship requires the ability to think critically, fighting past boredom, actively listen to a sermon, or the Holy Spirit, be OK with silence and solitude, read and study a text of Scripture, learn to say no to temptations...If we can't pay attention without the noise of our screens for more than 3 minutes, how will we ever discern the voice of our Good Shepherd who often speaks in the quiet, still, undistracted moments in the Word, in prayer?

The second scheme of the enemy is **to Kill**. From the beginning of the digital age the promise was to make our lives healthier, Happier. Do you know that we are using our devices so much that there are now newly defined digital injuries? Something called texting thumb, people are in PT for smartphone elbow, have you noticed what our phones have done to our posture? **texting neck syndrome [Picture],**

[To Kill Slide] Whether we are physically healthier because of our screens is debatable, but what is not debatable is its results on our emotional and mental health. Gene Twingy professor of psychology at San Diego State University looked at the significant rise in depressive symptoms, suicidality and suicide deaths among adolescents aged 13 to 18. Twingy found that the teens who reported more time on smartphones and social media were more likely to report symptoms of depression, anxiety and suicidality than the teens who spent more time off screens and doing face-to-face activities.² There are multiple studies that have found the more exposure we have to social media the more likely we are to experience the following mental health issues: anxiety, depression, social anxiety, low self-esteem, narcissism, insomnia and decreased sleep.³ Another study reports that heavy screen users exhibit Difficulty forming relationships in the real world.⁴ I'm not trying to be overdramatic here, but if the thief comes to kill is it possible that one of his most effective weapons is right in front of us lighting up our faces keeping us lonely and anxious and depressed in our own digital worlds.

The third scheme of the enemy is **To Destroy**. This is a word that can mean to separate or isolate. Jesus said in Matthew 15:24 that he came for the "lost" sheep of the house of Israel. Same word, lost. The enemy's strategy is to make us feel lost, to isolate us from one another, make us feel alone in the world. I asked Chat GPT (AI model) what is a false promise of the digital age? **Endless Connectivity: While technology connects us in unprecedented ways, it can**

² <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w-HOfseF2wF9YlpXwUUtP65-olnkPyWcgF5BiAtBEy0/edit>

³ Andy Crouch, The Tech-wise Family, multiple Barna Research and studies.

⁴ A study from Tidio, from Darren Patrick, The Digital Fast, p.19

also lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection from the physical world. The constant connectivity can sometimes erode personal relationships rather than strengthen them. Well Chat, that's for being honest. Here's what an actual human said about this, Andy Crouch who is joining us September 29 [Conversation: Building a Tech-Wise Life](#).

"We have never been so connected and lonely at the same time. Loneliness has spiked just as our media became social, our technology became personal, and our machines learn to recognize our faces."

But the word Jesus uses for Destroy most often means to bring to ruin. The enemy has also harnessed our screens as weapons of mass destruction through pornography and a host of other sexually destructive practices. The false promise of the enemy is instant, private, harmless sexual freedom and gratification at your fingertips. Instant? Yes. Private? Not nearly as much as you think. Your every click, search and scroll is being watched and monitored like you are on the Truman Show. Harmless? Couldn't be further from the truth. We don't have time to even scratch the surface of what pornography addiction is doing to our souls and our society.

- 30% of all internet traffic is pornography. Addiction levels for men and women across the generations is through the roof.
- 47% of Christians said pornography is a major problem in the home.
- The average person sees their first digital pornography between 11-13.
- An astonishing 62% of teenagers said they have received a nude image on their phone.
- The pornography industry is directly linked to the epidemic of sex crime: prostitution, child pornography, sex trafficking, sexual abuse, and rape.
- Evidence is piling up that the earlier and the more you use porn the less you're capable of real intimacy with real partners.
- One study of married couples in therapy: 70% say that pornography use has threatened their relationship. particularly concerning intimacy and trust. Lie after lie the enemy whispers in our culture- "This doesn't hurt anyone." "I can stop this at any time." "Once I'm married this problem will go away." "Watching porn can spice up our marriage." "This is normal for guys and my wife should just understand." And this one especially for Christians, "No one can know I struggle with this."
- 80% of people who struggle with pornography say they have no one helping them.⁵ This is part of my story...Lots of resources, reach out to someone in your small group, a friend, a pastor...
- www.brandywine.church/digitaldetox.

Let me just say a word to parents: We need filters and blockers of course but that is not the only thing. We have to be willing to have conversations with our kids. To be able to say "I'm your dad or mom until you're grown, it's my job to know what is going on in your life and therefore your phone." Our sons know that we can and we will look through their phones without even needing to ask or browse through their messages and apps in history, we have all their passwords. I realize that kids that are savvy, will delete text messages, hide things if they

⁵ Most of these statistics and info from Andy Crouch, The Life We're Looking For.

choose. But when they do so, they will know they are violating the culture of your home to their own peril. And I would rather open dialogue with my kids, even if it's hard to hear, and the discipline will be far less, than if it's hidden and discovered.

[Title Slide] So let's recap: The playbook of the enemy is kill, steal and destroy. The enemy of our souls is highly invested in digital technology, making false promises and schemes to distract, addict, disintegrate, divide and isolate us. So we've spent the last two weeks building our awareness and discernment, and I've been swinging pretty hard up here, maybe giving up the impression that we should all throw out our technology. Probably not... But I believe we have a crisis and the enemy is highly invested.

So let me provide some balance as we begin to close: Our goal is to put our digital technology in its proper place. Let me begin to give us some ways to discern if technology is in its proper place or not Andy Crouch helped me with some of these.⁶

Technology is in its proper place when it helps us bond with real people we have been given to love. It's out of its proper place when we become consumers of people at a distance, using them for our own gratification.

Technology is in its proper place when it starts great, sharpening conversations. It's out of its proper place when it prevents us from talking with and listening to one another.

Technology is in its proper place when it helps us acquire skill, accomplish meaningful work, or mastery of subjects that contribute to human flourishing (sports, music, cooking, writing, education, science, etc.). It's out of place when it replaces our need for skills deforms us.

Technology is in its proper place when it advances the gospel of Jesus and the glorious design of his creation. It's out of place when it advances self-promotion and being entertained by evil.

Technology is in its proper place when we are mature and disciplined enough to wield its power. Otherwise, it becomes dangerous to ourselves and others...like whoever wears the ring in Lord of the Rings.

Relational Challenge: Schedule time this week for relationships (hospitality, go for coffee, play golf, family dinner, etc). Come to church picnic, come to group fair next week. Text someone right now, who do you want to spend time with?

Digital Challenge: 7-Day Tech Fast. Take this challenge on as a small group, household, friend group and hold each other accountable.

Now of course everyone is going to do this a little bit differently according to what your job is if you're a social media influencer for a living or you make a living through making YouTube

⁶ Andy Crouch, The Tech Wise Family, p.20-21

videos your version of this may look a little different but let me just break it down for you so what's really clear. **1) Make your smartphone a dumb phone** what that means is remove everything from your phone screen, hide all your apps except phone, text, music, calendar, email, and things you need for utility like weather app or a fitness app. But remove social media, youtube, Prime Video, news, games, web browser. Turn off your notifications. For those that are very active on social media- we've made a **tech fast image that you can post.**

2) Limit all other screens that are for self-entertainment and distraction- gaming devices, streaming services, cable television, Netflix... Maybe you have a show or a movie that brings the family together, or a date night, that's fine.

[10:30 Only] Part of this is to see what actually happens to you individually and in your household and with your kids without all of these screens. Can I just say parents I would encourage you to make this mandatory with your kids. Do you think your kids are gonna be like great let me get off my phone probably not it's the kind of thing. They might put up a fight and some of them are really not happy with me right now for even suggesting this. But they may also see how powerful it is, and students, if you've been on the missions trip it means you've already done this, you can do it in your own environment as well! Boredom...so? In fact, I've come to the conclusion that the more you entertain children, the more bored they will get. Be bored for a little and suddenly creative play comes out of it.

3) The third part of this is to limit work screens to work hours if your job allows you to not have to be engaging work after hours then do that for the week. Put up a wall, put up a boundary, like live in a way where the device is working for you rather than you working for the device. And replace that time with the true ways to experience the abundant life in Jesus- Bible reading, prayer, reflection, solitude and silence, nature, conversation, sleep and rest, fun, games, family, adventure, service project, etc.

Now not everyone is going to join in to this level, and you don't have to...this isn't a legalistic thing, this isn't a cult...ideally you are doing it from the heart. This may not work for this week...maybe you need to delay a week, but don't put it off more than a couple weeks.

Hook: Next Week- The bad news is, the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy life. The good news is Jesus promises to give life if we follow him as our Shepherd. Next week we will learn how to replace our digital distractions with spiritual practices that lead to life.