

Digital Detox, Standing Strong, Ephesians 6:10-20, 9/29/24

Over the last three weeks, our goal is **learning to let our phones sleep so that we can be fully awake to our life with God and others.** We discovered last week in Psalm 23 that this life to the full that Jesus promises comes from living like sheep in the green pasture that our Good Shepherd has lead us to. This week we want to close Digital Detox by learning how to stand strong against the schemes of the enemy in the digital age, particularly stealing our time and attention.

[Title Slide] The older you get, the more you hear yourself saying “It seems like just yesterday... Where did the time go?” It seems like just yesterday I was rolling my eyes at my grandmother saying... “It seems like just yesterday you were only this tall as she grabbed my cheeks”. This has been on my mind this week. On Tuesday, my son Nathan and I spent most of the night discussing college essay topics because soon he will need to make some decisions about what’s next after graduation. I have a senior thinking about college...how is that possible? There is a part of me that says, didn’t I just get here to DE, Nathan was in 3rd grade when we arrived. Where did the time go? And then the very next day I went up to Hershey to visit my dad who just had a very complicated surgery with a long road, hard road ahead of him. Thanks to so many of you who have been praying for him, that means so much to my family and me, those prayers are felt. But if I can be honest, it’s really hard to watch my father like that, wondering how much time we have with him left. And as I was driving back home, these two realities converging this week- a son getting ready to graduate, my dad laying in a hospital bed with tubes everywhere...I felt the weight of how fleeting and precious time truly is, and how tragic and foolish it is to waste it. The Bible says it like this- **Psalm 90:12, So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.**

Ephesians 5:15-16 ¹⁵ Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

It seems that God sees our time as one of our greatest resources to steward well. Imagine if you had a magical hourglass that showed you how much time you had left on earth. And every hour, every day, every month there’s a little more sand on the bottom and a little less sand on the top. Do you think that would impact how you think about your life, what you do with your time?

Our screens may be the greatest time and attention wasters this world has ever seen. Many of you are familiar or maybe have read **C.S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*** A power fictional that continues to be just as relevant today as it was 80 years ago when it was written, the plot is this there's a senior demon by the name of Screwtape and he's training a younger nephew demon by the name of Wormwood and is writing to him about all kinds of techniques to tempt and distract a Christian called “the patient”. Well I saw a meme recently that it said this, **“My dear Wormwood, disregard everything I wrote in my previous letters. Just get your patient to buy a**

smartphone and it'll do all the work for us. Your affectionate Uncle Screwtape." Now obviously, that's a bit overstated, but what makes it humorous is the amount of truth there.

How are you doing stewarding your time and attention? Do you have a heart of wisdom or the fool? Today isn't 5 steps to managing your time better- you can get that in the self-help section of Barnes and Nobles because what we need is to realize is we are in a spiritual battle. What we really need is to learn how to stand strong against the schemes of the enemy. Turn with me to Ephesians 6. Here in Ephesians 6 is the most comprehensive teaching on spiritual warfare in the Bible. I'm going to read the whole passage and then I want to show you how to stand strong against the enemy who seeks to steal our time and attention from the things that bring us life.

Ephesians 6

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Do you notice a word or phrase repeated? **Stand strong!** Do you know this is always the strategy against the Devil and his schemes? Never are we told to fight by going on the attack. James 4:7- resist the Devil, he will flee from you. 1 Peter 5:8-9 Resist him, firm in your faith. Never in Scripture are we told to attack or try to defeat Satan. Even Jesus when he was tempted never went on the attack. He did try to push him off the edge of the temple. He stood his ground. Why? Because Jesus has already defeated Satan on the cross through his death. Removing Satan's hold over us through the curse of sin and death. And while he still roams, and whispers,

and tempts and is powerful, we must remember he's the walking dead. He's a defeated foe. And he will come to a definitive end, and so will all evil, sin and death at the return of Jesus and the final judgment. And so in the meantime, we stand strong!

What does that look like? In particular, what does it look like in the context of the digital age in which we live to stand firm against the enemy's scheme to steal our time and attention? Three keys to standing strong.

1. Stand Strong on God's Truth. ¹⁴ *Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist,* In those days, a soldier's belt was critical that it held together and in place the breastplate and the sword. It also held the soldier upright and stable in carrying the heavy equipment. This is why Paul lists this first. That's the Word. God's Word holds together our spiritual armor and stabilizes us to stand strong against the enemy. The only way we can develop a heart of wisdom and discernment as Psalm 90 says or understand the will of the Lord as Ephesians 5 says, we've got to know our Bibles.

"Christ, the scripture, your own hearts, and Satan's devices are the four primary things that should first and most be studied and searched. If any cast off the study of these, they cannot be safe here nor happy hereafter." -English Puritan Thomas Brooks: *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* Are you making time and giving proper attention to the study of the Scriptures? You cannot be safe here from the schemes of the enemy if you aren't.

-Off-Screen Bible Study: With an actual Bible in hand, pencil, journal or paper. Here's how I do that. Print off the text wide margin, circle, highlight... You don't have to do it like me, but just do it some way. There is no short-cut to resilient discipleship to Jesus, we must become students of the Word.

-Memorize specific **Fighter Verses**. V.17 *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* We think of the sword as weapon of attack, but in this instance, it is used to parry the attacks of the enemy. When he tries to wound us with a lie, with an accusation, when he tries to tempt us to distraction, just like Jesus in the wilderness, we use the specific truths in the Word of God to stand firm, "It is written!" I know memorization is a lost art in a digital age, but at the exact moment of temptation it might be too late to go searching for a verse, we need to have the Scripture ready on our hearts and minds. And I have lots of them memorized based on how I am most vulnerable. Let me give you some great fighter verses specifically to fight against digital distraction and temptation.

When the enemy tempts us to get into a war of words on social media, outrage and fighting- **James 1:20** *The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

When the enemy tempts us with digital compulsion whether it is the lust of pornography, doom scrolling or online shopping: **1 Corinthians 10:13** *No temptation has overtaken you except what*

is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear.

But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

When the enemy tempts us through self-pity and loneliness that might cause us to use our screens as a coping mechanism. **Hebrews 4:15-16** *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.*

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

When the enemy tempts us with turning to our screens in distraction or escapism- **Psalm 119:37** *Turn my eyes away from worthless things and give me life in your ways.* I have hidden your Word in my heart so I might not sin against you. Do you have God's Word ready in the moment of the battle?

And so this is where Paul starts- we stand strong on God's Truth, found in his Word. Let me show you where he ends down in verse 18-20. What word is repeated over and over again? 5x in 3 verses Paul calls them to prayer- Pray with all kinds of prayers and on all occasions and for all God's people, and pray for all advancements of the Gospel. **Key#2 Stand strong in Communal Prayer.** As Hudson Taylor once said, "The church moves forward on her knees." We are intended to be a community, a family who prays for each other and with each other. This is critical especially in the digital age where we are facing an epidemic of loneliness where the average person has 1.8 friends, the lowest in known human history. This is especially true for men, which part of what we want to change in the culture here, our first step coming in the men's breakfast I mentioned. We need to pray for one another in community, and if we are going to pray for each other it presupposes we know what's going on in each other's lives.

I was in a small group years ago with a group of men and we would go around and share prayer requests and the same guy would pray for work, finances, his kids...you know the standard male prayer list. Week after week, same prayer requests. And then one day he came to small group and he was a broken man- his wife took the car, the kids and \$10,000 and left a dear Jon note... literally his name was Jon. What we learned over the next several weeks is that Jon had a major anger problem that on several occasions got scary- holes in the wall, scaring the children, one time he admitted laying hands on his wife, he refused to get help...his wife finally left. And part of what made this so sad is that Jon came for an entire year and never opened up to us about this part of his life and missed out on the opportunity for support, healing, accountability, strength in prayer. When we aren't being honest, we are at our most vulnerable to the schemes of the enemy. In this digital age of isolation, hiding behind our screens where we can project an image of us that isn't the real us, we need this community now more than ever. **What brothers or sisters in Christ know your deepest vulnerabilities and most susceptible areas of temptation?** Really pray for you, not just for school and work and finances and ailments...these are

important, but this is a battle NOT IN FLESH AND BLOOD, its spiritual! Get in a small group... guys, come to the breakfast as a first start to developing these relationships.

We start with standing strong on God's Truth, we end with Standing strong in communal prayer. And what is all the battle armor in the middle? V.14-17 *with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*

¹⁶ *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation* What is this armor? It's aspects of the gospel of Jesus. [Verse 14-15 slide] Righteousness- not that we are righteous but that our righteousness comes from Jesus who was righteous in our place and declares us righteous. Gospel of peace- that we now are not at war with God anymore, Jesus himself is our peace, satisfying the wrath of God with his sacrifice. We are now on team Jesus waging war against the enemy. [Verse 16-17 slide] Shield of faith- we stand on our faith alone, now by our good works so that no one can boast. Salvation that while we fight the battle, the war is won. Salvation is found in no other name but Jesus who will come again for us.

Key #3 stand strong on Grace found in the Gospel of Jesus. In this battle in the digital age- if we try to stand strong in our own might, on our own good works, our own willpower we will fall flat on our faces. I often say all my own will power is used up by lunch time. Resiliency comes from standing firm in his powerful grace in the gospel. We are going to fail. We are going to sometimes commit ourselves to reading the word and then we find ourselves scrolling facebook. We are going to be trying to live in the peace of Jesus and then start getting angry about a political post someone wrote. You need to get in the habit of **Preach the gospel to yourself.** When you rise in the morning, before you go to your phone for the news of the day, are you preaching the gospel to yourself? When you need power to fight distraction and doom scrolling in the middle of the day, are you preaching the gospel to yourself? When you fall and fail in looking at something you shouldn't have or wasting time do you preach the gospel to yourself?

We are in a battle in the digital age, the enemy has weaponized screens to steal our time and attention. Are we battling with the armor of the Word, communal support and prayer, the gospel of Jesus? Tomorrow morning- let's put on the armor first thing when we wake up.

Reminder Building Tech-Wise Life

Hook for Next week: Looming large over our lives, our conversations, our fears and anxiety as well as our hopes for the future, is the presidential election just weeks away. How should we face this election? How does our faith inform our decision? How do we maintain trust in God's sovereignty and unity together in the midst of division and uncertainty? Come next week to hear Pastor Nate's heart for our nation and our congregation as we face the election.