

Wisdom for a Smartphone Age: The Dangers of Distraction and Disembodiment

I. The Danger of Distraction

- A.** Our phones feed our addiction to distractions. We need to work to minimize those distractions so we can pay attention to what matters most.
- B.** What is a distraction? Can some distractions be honoring to God/good/sanctified?
 - 1. Distraction – something which pulls our attention from where it was or should have been focused.
 - 2. A distraction doesn't have to be explicitly sinful to be a problem.
- C.** How do our digital technologies distract us?
 - 1. *Internal* desires that make us want to be distracted (ex., Desire for something new)
 - 2. *External* distractions from our devices (ex., Notifications)
- D.** The spiritual dangers of distraction
 - 1. Distraction by the things of the world (Luke 8:14)
 - 2. Distraction by good things at the wrong time (Luke 10:38-42)
- E.** Are we addicted (enslaved) to distraction? (1 Cor. 6:12)
 - 1. Are we in routines and habits of nothingness when it comes to our use of digital technology?
 - 2. What symptoms might we see that would indicate we are?
- F.** How do we resist unhelpful distractions from our technology?
 - 1. First, discover where the biggest distractions are for you.
 - 2. Second, develop spiritual resistance to unhelpful distractions by
 - a. Biblical watchfulness (attention to what matters most)
 - (i) Thinking regularly of the return of Christ and our own death and resurrection (Matt. 24:42, 1 Cor. 16:13)
 - (ii) Watch the direction of your own life (Ps. 90:12, 1 Cor. 16:13, Col. 4:2)
 - b. Prioritize undistracted time with the Lord
 - (i) Ex. Jesus going off alone to pray and Psalms on meditating on the Word of God.
 - (ii) We must have times when the distractions are intentionally set aside so that we can give our minds and hearts to worshiping and communing with God.
 - 3. Third, develop physical barriers to distractions
 - a. 12 boundaries for smartphone usage to consider¹
 - (i) Turn off all nonessential push notifications.
 - (ii) Delete expired, nonessential, and time-wasting apps.
 - (iii) At night, keep your phone out of the bedroom.
 - (iv) Use a real alarm clock, not your phone alarm, to keep the phone out of your hands in the morning.
 - (v) Guard your morning disciplines and evening sleep patterns by using phone settings to mute notifications between one hour before bedtime to a time when you can

¹ This list is from Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You*, 200.

- reasonably expect to be finished with personal disciplines in the morning (9 p.m. to 7 a.m. for me).
- (vi) Use self-restricting apps to help limit your smartphone functions and the amount of time you invest in various platforms.
 - (vii) Recognize that much of what you respond to quickly can wait. Respond at a later, more convenient time.
 - (viii) Even if you need to read emails on your smartphone, use strategic points during the day to respond to emails at a computer (thirty minutes each at 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. for me).
 - (ix) Invite your spouse, your friends, and your family members to offer feedback on your phone habits (more than 70 percent of Christians in my survey said nobody else knew how much time they spent online).
 - (x) When eating with your family members or friends, leave your phone out of sight.
 - (xi) When spending time with family members or friends, or when you are at church, leave your phone in a drawer or in your car, or simply power it off.
 - (xii) At strategic moments in life, digitally detox your life and recalibrate your ultimate priorities. Step away from social media for frequent strategic stoppages (each morning), digital Sabbaths (one day offline each week), and digital sabbaticals (two two-week stoppages each year).

II. The Danger of Ignoring Our Physicality

- A.** Our digital technology pushes us to evade the limits of our embodiment and ignore its importance in our relationships
- B.** Embodiment
 - 1. God made us a unified body and soul (Gen. 2:7, 21-23).
 - 2. Embodiment means
 - a. God gives us limits in time, space, and ability (Acts 17:26).
 - b. A calling to prioritize people we physically encounter (Lk. 10:25-37).
 - c. We have a need for face-to-face relationships (2 Jn. 12, Heb. 10:24-25).
- C.** The dangers of disembodied living
 - 1. Dangers to physical life and health.
 - 2. Dangers to relationships (ignoring those immediately around us).
 - 3. Dangers of treating technology as if it is human and humans as if they are technology.

Questions for Discussion at Home

- 1. In what ways do we notice ourselves and each other being distracted by technology?
- 2. Why do you think it is important for us to spend time face-to-face with each other?
- 3. Why do you think many people find online friendships easier than in-person ones?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1. How do you start your day? Does your routine help you love God and prepare you to serve others and live faithfully? If not, what could you change about your routine?
- 2. Look over the “12 boundaries for smartphone usage to consider.” Pick a couple that you believe will help you put off “habits of nothingness” and make a plan to implement those for the rest of this Sunday school term. Just try it and see how it positively or negatively affects your walk with God and relationships.