

Wisdom for a Smartphone Age: The Danger of Losing Discernment (and the Ability to Think)

I. Is God Concerned with Our Minds?

- A. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and *mind* (Matt. 22:37-38).
- B. And our minds are a gift from God to be:
 - 1. able to discern truth and goodness (Rom. 12:2, Prov. 14:8)
 - 2. sober-minded rather than mentally clouded or driven by feelings (1 Pet. 1:13, 5:8)

II. Digital Technology Can Shift Our Ideas of Truth and Authority¹

- A. Truth by consensus (wikipedia)
 - 1. Some possibly good things of Wikipedia as a tool
 - a. Increases sources (not just one or two people) and covers many more topics.
 - b. It is convenient and inexpensive.
 - 2. Drawbacks
 - a. Most anybody can post or amend – this levels authority structures.
 - b. It reshapes our idea of truth to consensus.
- B. Truth by relevance (search engines)
 - 1. Possible strengths
 - a. Internet allows us access to the largest depository of information EVER ... in our pockets!
 - b. If it didn't try to give you what is relevant, you could look forever.
 - 2. Drawbacks
 - a. Authority and truth are reshaped as relevance.
 - b. What is relevant can be manipulated by the companies and tech savvy people.
- C. Truth by summarizing and organizing huge amounts of data (ChatGPT)
 - 1. Helpful
 - a. This is helpful in a day of information overload
 - b. It can save tons of time, especially with mundane tasks or questions.
 - 2. Drawbacks
 - a. Large data doesn't mean truth, but it gets asserted as if it is.
 - b. AI hallucinations (it gets it wrong, and it can play into people's own hallucinations)²
 - c. Bias
 - d. Used by humans to make very real looking/sounding fakes
- D. Truth by "likes" and responses (social media: Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Youtube)
 - 1. Potential benefits
 - a. A way for attention to be given to issues that might not otherwise get widespread attention
 - 2. Drawbacks
 - a. Does the structure of social media focus on truth and wisdom if what it is designed to promote is what can go viral (i.e., what garners strongest reactions)?

¹ Many of the ideas and examples in this section come from chapter 8 of Tim Challies's book *The Next Story*.

² "People are Losing their Loved ones to AI fueled spiritual fantasies" <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/ai-spiritual-delusions-destroying-human-relationships-1235330175/>

III. The Design of Digital Technology Weakens Our Ability to Think

- A. The way something is built affects its strengths and abilities.
 - 1. Ex. A plane is designed to fly, not so much to drive down the street.
 - 2. Communication technology's design affects the message.
- B. Digital technology is built for speed; not reflection and wisdom
 - 1. Speed – takes us from one thing to the next. Cp. raking leaves to digging for diamonds.
 - 2. To grow in our ability to think, to mature, we must have time and sustained thought on issues.
- C. Digital technology, with its algorithms, helps us accumulate teachers who suit our passions
 - 1. As one writer put it, “the algorithm serves us what we crave, not necessarily what we need for spiritual nourishment.”³
 - 2. “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Tim. 4:3-4)
- D. Digital technology prioritizes the present moment and often ignore wisdom from the past
 - 1. *Presentism* – the thought that what is new and current is more likely true and good and that what is from the past is outdated and unhelpful at best.
 - 2. Scripture calls us to “remember” and to “ask for the ancient paths” as we look for goodness (Jer. 6:16).
- E. Digital technology can stifle our creativity and learning by doing it for us.
 - 1. Study at MIT in which 3 groups tasked with writing a paper.⁴
 - 2. What is the purpose of writing a paper? To get a grade or to internalize knowledge?

IV. What Habits Can We Put on to Protect Our Minds?

- A. When you use digital tools, remember that their design affects how they are most beneficially used.
- B. Submit yourself to God given authorities in your life
- C. Read good books
- D. Cultivate a love for listening to the sermon each Sunday (2 Tim. 4:2-4)

V. Application

- A. Family discussion
 - 1. In what ways has the leveling of authority that is built into many of our digital tools affected the way you think of parents, pastors, or other authorities in your life?
 - 2. The world's current mottos are “be true to yourself,” “follow your heart,” and “that’s your truth.” What is wrong with this form of thinking? How are our tools further entrenching these ideas?
 - 3. What are some ways you can strengthen your mind to love God?
- B. Personal reflection
 - 1. How is your smartphone weakening your mind and discernment? What actions will you take this week to counter that?
 - 2. What are some possible drawbacks to reading your Bible on a digital device? What are some ways having a digital Bible helps?

³ Collin Hansen in chapter 6 of *Scrolling Ourselves to Death*, 103.

⁴ <http://media.mit.edu/publications/your-brain-on-chatgpt/> accessed 6/26/25.