

Wisdom for a Smartphone Age:
The Danger of Being Disciplined by Our Devices

I. We Become Like What We Love and Worship & We are All Disciples

- A. Everyone worships (Romans 1:18-25)
- B. We become like what we love and worship (Ps. 115:8, 2 Cor. 3:18)
- C. We are always being disciplined/shaped in what we ultimately value by the culture and people we learn from (Rom. 12:2; Gal. 1:6-7, 3:1; Heb. 13:7, Titus 2)

II. Dangers of Being Disciplined by Our Devices

- A. Technology disciplines us
 - 1. Jason Thacker writes, “Technology not only informs us, but forms us. From the beliefs it helps to normalize to the habits it creates, technology reaches deep and disciplines us in a particular way of living . . . The question is not whether we are being disciplined by technology, but how and for what purpose?”¹
 - 2. Look at three specific dangers related to how our technology shapes us.
- B. Dangers of our own devices: when the device becomes the idol (Ps. 20:7)
 - 1. Smartphones, even apart from the specific messages they carry to us, can become an object of our hope and trust for the good life.
 - 2. The smartphone gives us a more plausible false god than other technologies. Tempted to trust in them for safety and the good life (they can seem all-knowing, present, powerful).
 - 3. At its best the smartphone is the swiss-army knife of the modern person. But, at its worst, it calls for a deeper trust; to rescue and fulfill us.
- C. Dangers of our own designs: when the app’s design aims to conform us to the world’s philosophy
 - 1. The central idol of our culture is the Self. Expressive individualism.²
 - a. That is: Each individual’s desires are seen as the most important, identity/life shaping realities for him or her rather than external realities, their community, morality, or God. What you feel is real, no matter what.
 - b. And as such, these inner desires being expressed is the central ritual of worship in our culture.
 - c. Social media, as a medium for communication, is designed in a way that disciplines us in expressive individualism.
 - (i) What is it designed to do? Focus on individuals expressing their every thought and getting liked (validated) by others.
 - (ii) Without careful thought the gravity of the design will do its work on us, bending us away from a God-centered way of life and shaping us by self-expression.

¹ Jason Thacker, “Click with Caution: How Technology is Disciplining Kids,” accessed 7/9/25 at <https://equip.sbts.edu/publications/magazine/click-with-caution-how-technology-is-disciplining-kids/>. See also Samuel James *Digital Liturgies*, “because Christian teaching will not let us divide what happens to our minds and affections from what happens to our spirits, the web’s ability to reshape us as people becomes a spiritual ability” (59).

² This philosophy has been labeled “Expressive Individualism,” which is to say, “Each of us finds our meaning by giving expression to our own feelings and desires” (Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 46).

D. Dangers of our world's disciplers: when influencers and algorithms replace godly discipleship.

1. How are we disciplined in Christ? How do we have our admiration for Jesus and living for him stoked and our lives shaped to look like our savior?
2. Social media contains personal examples (influencers) and content (videos, etc.)
 - a. The digital discipler – the influencer. Are they exemplifying Christ or the world's wisdom?
 - b. Content – Does it teach God's way or the world's way? (1 John 2:15-17)

III. Questions for Growth

A. Family Discussion

1. Could I go a day without my phone without feeling anxious? Why or why not? Can we test this?
2. Who are some people in your family and church that you should pay more attention to and learn from their examples?
3. In what ways do you think social media influences you towards loving Christ and believing that God's wisdom is better than the world? In what ways does it shape you in the world's ways of thinking? What changes might you make in your social media habits based on your answers?

B. Personal Reflection

1. Ask yourself, what do I rely on my phone for? Am I doing that in a way that replaces God, or that glorifies in God for the good gift. How do I feel if I lose my phone? Anxious and vulnerable? Or simply inconvenienced? What does my response say about my relationship to my phone?
2. What is my purpose or goal in my social media usage? Does that need to be adjusted to help my discipleship and worship in Christ?