

## **The Gospel and Social Media WEDNESDAYS AT TRACE | MARCH 22, 2017**

Some opening verses:

- Eph. 5:15-17 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
- Psalm 101:3 I will not set anything worthless before my eyes. I hate the practice of transgression; it will not cling to me.
- Prov. 27:2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.

Social Media (from Alatair Roberts):

The Internet can enable us to form connections with people with whom we have extremely particular things in common, making possible highly stimulating, enriching, and deepening interactions. I wouldn't be where or who I am today were it not for online interactions sustaining and helping me to develop a perspective that often bears little relation to my immediate contexts over the years.

This said, while I have undoubtedly gained an immense amount from these, I have frequently found them to be a retreat from the challenge of actual relationships with Christian neighbors with whom I differ, a temptation amplified for me by virtue of the fact that I can naturally be an extreme introvert, prone to reclusiveness. When you know that there is a place where everyone largely agrees with and values you, one can develop a reluctance to go to a church where you are not so valued, understood, or appreciated. The narcissism that can be characteristic of romantic ideals — romantic ideals that can actually drive us away from our real partners into escapist and emotionally comforting reveries — can also cause us to replace the concrete relationships of our given contexts with idealized communities in which we can forgo the struggles associated with the transformation of actual communities and the need to adapt to and be vulnerable to others.

Some Important Diagnostic Questions about Our Smartphones and Social Media Habits (From Alastair Roberts):

The diagnostic tests that we should run — and should continually be running — ought to be informed by a clearer concept of what our freedom is *for* and the sorts of shapes that it takes. The bigger questions that we need to address are as follows: Do our particular uses of our smartphones, and our use of a smartphone more generally, have the actual effect — not just hold the theoretical possibility — of making us better servants of God and of our neighbors? Are our smartphones tools that facilitate our commitment to the central purposes and values of our lives, or are they — and our habitual modes of using them — constantly distracting, diverting, or obstructing us from them?

More specific diagnostic questions could include such as the following:

1. Is my smartphone making it difficult for me to give the activities and persons in my life the full and undivided attention and self-presence that they require and deserve?
2. Do I habitually use my smartphone as an easy escape and distraction from the difficult task of wrestling through the experience of lack of stimulation and boredom to the rewarding reality of true engagement?
3. Is my smartphone use squeezing out my inner life, encroaching upon time that would otherwise be given to private contemplation, reflection, and meditation? Do I use it as a way to distract myself from unsettling truths and realities that can slowly come into focus in moments of silence and solitude?
4. Am I using hyper-connectedness to substitute a self unthinkingly immersed in a shallow and amniotic communal consciousness and its emotions, for the difficult task of developing my own judgment, character, disciplines, resolve, and identity?

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5. Are my uses of my smartphone arresting and hampering my processes of deliberation and reflection, encouraging reactive judgments and premature decisions?
6. Is my use of my smartphone mediating my relationship with and understanding of myself in unhealthy ways?
7. Is my smartphone a tool that I use, or has it fettered my attention and time to other persons and activities that are wasteful and overly demanding of them?
8. Are my uses of my smartphone preventing me from developing and maintaining healthy patterns and routines in my life, disrupting my sleeping patterns, interrupting my concentration upon my work, habituating me to the fragmentation of my time and attention?
9. Is my smartphone usage consuming time that I used to or could potentially devote to worthier activities? Do I use my smartphone to “kill time” that I could otherwise fill with prayer, reading, writing, edifying conversation, face-to-face interactions, and more?
10. Are my uses of my smartphone conducive to the faithfulness and freedom of others? Am I using my smartphone in ways that create unhealthy demands and pressures upon them?

Jim Stitzinger: Like it or not, our kids live in a world of increasing digital communication. Social media streams, texting, email, and chat features in video games are only a few ways they may engage others. Ignoring the subject is dereliction of duty and unfiltered access to digital content is insanity. We are stewards of the next generation, entrusted to bring up our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4). That responsibility compels us to preemptively and proactively lead this conversation. They must learn and implement Scripture so that by the Holy Spirit’s power they may harness social media for good (Ps 119:9-11).

Some reminders about social media (from Stitzinger’s *Social Media and Middle Schoolers*):

- Not everyone has it.
- It’s not real.
  - People are addicted to social media for the same reason they are addicted to pornography. It’s not real. The virtual world posted online doesn’t include the mundane, humiliating, and often heartbreaking realities of everyone’s life. All we see are the finest moments, the clearest thoughts, the things we want to celebrate or project. Discontentment and discouragement are the lions that are crouched, ready to pounce on your mind as you compare your life to what you perceive others are experiencing.
- The world is a dangerous place
  - Trolling perverts, incendiary critics and reckless commentators are part of life. We will teach you the tactics and tools to combat them both physically and electronically. When you master those tactics and tools, you can then get in the arena. By the way, we’ll be in the arena with you. So will the Holy Spirit, along with every single Bible verse you have committed to memory.
- You may not can handle it now
  - We live in a brutal world. Thank God we can’t audibly hear all the slander, gossip, boasting and complaining going on around us all day. There is only so much information your heart and mind can handle right now. You battle enough to get your homework finished, read your Bible, read other books, serve others, play outside, exercise, make things, talk with your family and friends...the last you need is vapid blather from insipid sources.
- Digital content is eternal
  - Process that. The adult version of you will one day grieve over the embarrassing, irrational, prideful things the middle school version of you is currently doing. Don’t immortalize those bad memories by creating a digital record. You are young, growing in the most amazing ways. We are not keeping a record of your wrongdoing, don’t create an electronic one for this unforgiving world to discover.

- Discipline produces freedom
  - The greater self-control and responsibility you exhibit, the greater freedom you will enjoy not only in social media circles, but with many of life's tools such as computers, cell phones, and of course, the car...when and if we get there.

A special word from Stitzinger to his 12 year old twin sons:

- Your middle school years are challenging enough without tyrannical digital feeds. Use your endless energy to grow strong in biblical knowledge, develop discernment, and pour your creative talents into serving others.
- Two words will open the door to your social media access: necessity and maturity. The need will be obvious as school projects, career aspirations, and other opportunities will depend on it. When the need arises and you have the maturity to handle it, it's no problem to help you get started. Those same two words are the gatekeepers for other areas of life too. Get ready to hear them as we talk about driving, cooking over a gas range, having a pocket knife, using your rifle, going to your friend's house and many more.
- It may be hard right now to trust us when many good (and bad) people around you have greater freedom. When they ask you, tell them it is a decision your parents made for our family. You don't need to explain any further, just simply say, "my dad said no, not now." Don't try to covertly circumvent this rule. God's omniscience, your guilty conscience, and our parenting strategy will not let you be successful for very long. It's your job to trust God and obey, it's that simple.

Chuck Hooten: So, how should we, as Christians, use our power and influence on social media? Before you post and update or a response, ask yourself if what you are about to post has implications for eternity. If you only had one chance to speak to someone about what's most important to you, ask yourself if what you are about to say is worth being the last thing they ever hear from you. If you offend and lose the attention of someone who desperately needs to hear the gospel, just so that you can air your opinion on the president, is it worth it? If someone's eternity is impacted by your immediate need to feel better, has the Kingdom of God been served? Are we willing to relinquish our American right to express our personal commentary on social issues of the day for the ongoing unity of the eternal Kingdom of God? We must trade in our American rights for Kingdom purpose.

#### Common Sense Rules for Social Media

- If I am to offend, let me offend with the gospel alone.
- If there's a chance I lose the opportunity to speak about Jesus because of what I am about to post, do not proceed.
- Always seek the unity of the Body of Christ.
- Realize that what I say is attached to my local church, the church universal, and the Kingdom of God.
- Be certain you are truly informed on issues before you voice your opinion.
- Be cautious of sources from which you are drawing your opinions.
- Evaluate whether your voice on social media misrepresents what matters to you most.
- Don't say to everyone publicly what you really just need to say to someone personally.

#### A Strategy for Social Media

By Ray Ortlund (taken from an interview with him posted on Desiring God)

*Ray, in your excellent commentary on Proverbs, published in 2012, you wrote this: "Twitter and blogs and emails would be cleared of much conflict if we humbled our opinions before Christ. What are we here for, really? What does God want to be stirred up in our hearts? He says, stir one another up to love and good*

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deeds" ([Heb. 10:24](#)). You're online. So explain the connection and how this works for you in deciding what to post on social media and Facebook.

Right. I don't think of Facebook as a website. It is a land mine brilliantly disguised as a website. So I got out of Facebook last summer. And I didn't just deactivate my account. I deleted it, because I found that for me personally it started to take too much time. I found it just got me riled up at times in ways I don't want. It is not hard to find political stupidity. It is not hard to find reasons to get angry over developments in our culture and so forth, and there was too much there that was counteracting my desire to walk with the Lord. So I bailed out.

I still have a blog at The Gospel Coalition. I do use Twitter and I do use Instagram. Those are more controlled environments online and I can still pursue my purposes more easily there. But when you ask what I try to do with social media, I think of a wonderful verse in [Isaiah 50:4](#), "That I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary." Everyone is weary. We are living under intense pressure. We don't need more. What we all need is to be helped with a sustaining word. And it doesn't need to be much. And I can't ask anyone for their attention for very long.

So whether it is a blog post or whatever it might be, I want to sustain with a brief word the one who is weary. I want to maximize what I can impart to them with a minimum of commitment on their part. So I don't want to be the online watch dog of the Christian Church and the corrector of everything that is wrong. I want to be an encourager. I think the Lord is. I believe encouragement is one of the most important ministries of the Christian Church. And I think that is what social media is for.

## A Social Media Heart Check

By: Tim Challies

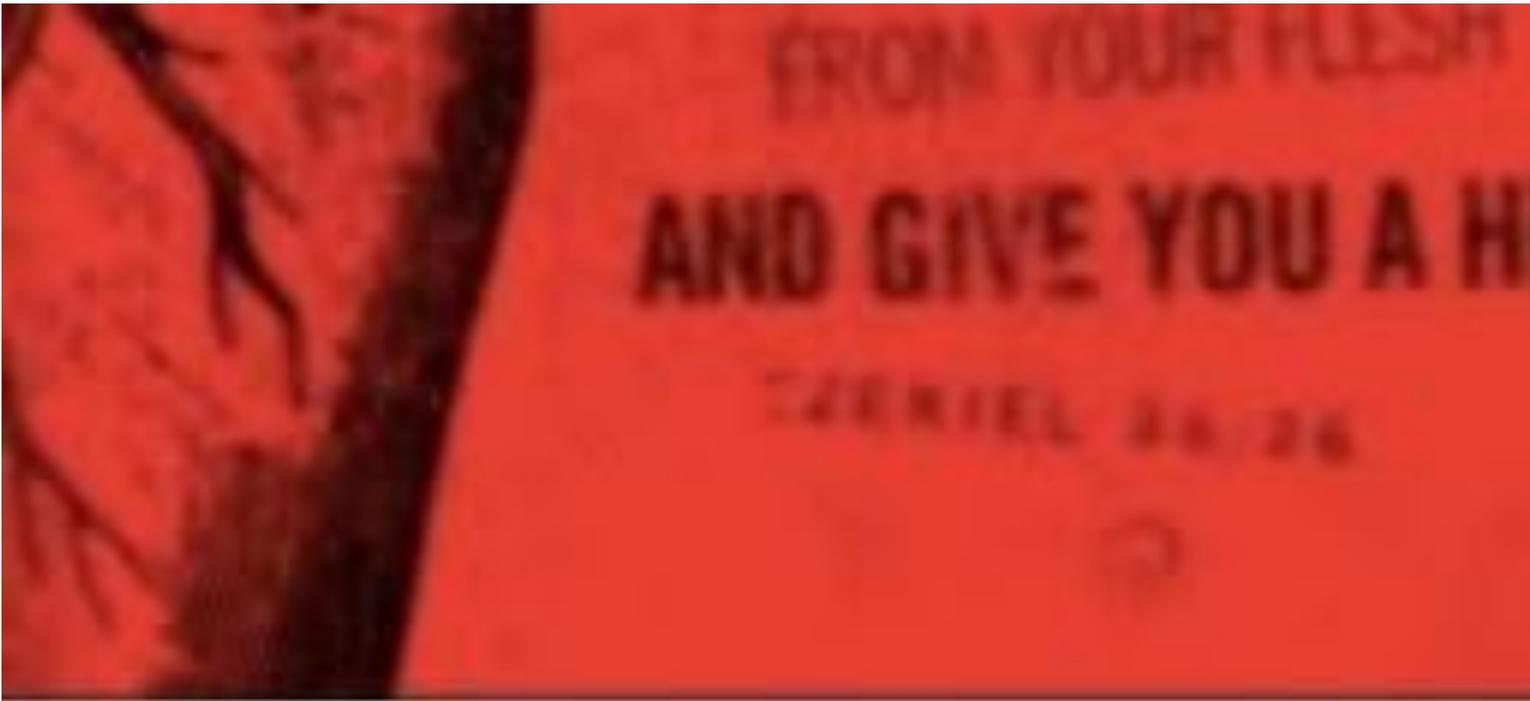
One of the remarkable facts about life in this digital world is that we leave trails behind us wherever we go and whatever we do. I am writing today from Huntsville, Alabama; Rogers, my cell phone company, knows I am here. They know the route I took to get here—from my home to Toronto's airport, a layover in Chicago, then my route from Huntsville's airport to this home. It has all been recorded as my phone has checked in with a variety of cell phone towers. In the same way Google has a record of searches I've made today, and yesterday and the day before.

Facebook keeps track of the name of every person you've searched for, every status update, every comment on another person's status, every photo you've liked, every friend you've made. Taking a look at this list makes for a helpful social media heart-check.

I'd encourage you to take just a few moments to do this heart-check. Here's how to begin. Go to Facebook and then click on your name to see your profile:



Then click on "Activity Log."



Then make sure this box is selected (click it so a checkmark appears):



Now you will see something like this:

February 2013

TODAY

 Tim searched for Aileen Challies

 Tim posted something via Twitter.

"After all these years of traveling, I finally got upgrade to first class courtesy of Air Canada; never be the same."

Here is a list of just about everything you've done on Facebook. It will go on and on and on, showing all of your activity. Let me suggest a few questions you may want to ask yourself as you look at it.

Would you be comfortable having your husband or wife sitting beside you and seeing this activity log? How about your pastor or a good friend?

Look at the comments you've left and the status updates you've made. How do they stand up in the light of Ephesians 4:15 which tells us to "speak truth in love." How do they stand up in light of James chapter 3 which warns us about the power of our words and the recklessness with which we use them? Or Colossians 4:6 which says, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt."

Look at the names of the people you have searched for. This may be the scariest part of all! Why did you search for those people? Would you want those people to know that you were searching for them? Were you looking for helpful information or making a useful connection? Is it possible that you were looking for alluring photos or gossip? Would you want your husband or wife to know that you searched for these people?

Look at the number of updates you've made and consider the amount of time you've used Facebook. What does that tell you about how you use your time. Ephesians 5: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."

Parents may do well to spend time with their children going through this list and talking to them about their use of Facebook.

Social media gives us some very helpful opportunities and abilities, but it is also a powerful reflector of what is going on in the heart. Don't run away from the opportunity to probe a little bit!

## A Social Media Heart Check

By: Kim Cash Tate

- Am I walking by the Spirit?
  - Only as we walk by the Spirit in the social media sphere can we make an impact there for Christ.
- Am I bragging?
- Am I battling envy and discontent?
- Is this the best use of my time?

## Solomon's Twitter Guidelines

Mar 17, 2017 | Kevin DeYoung

Twitter can be great. I often find good articles, good lines, and good laughs during my daily Twitter scroll. But Twitter—like any other social media outlet—can be a cesspool of vanity and vice.

I've probably broken these rules more than I realize, but here's how I think about what I should and shouldn't tweet. A big shout out to King Solomon for his help in putting these 25 guidelines together.

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1. Think before you tweet, and don't be afraid to just delete. There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing ([Prov. 12:18](#))
2. It's okay to unfollow some people, block them, or ignore them. Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge ([Prov. 14:7](#))
3. Turn the volume down from 11. Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly ([Prov. 14:29](#)).
4. Don't make things worse. A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention (15:18).
5. Their platform is pointless if it makes an end run around humility. The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor ([Prov. 15:33](#)).
6. There is nothing impressive about being a hothead. Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city ([Prov. 16:32](#)).
7. Make good news public, and keep bad news as private as possible. Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends ([Prov. 17:9](#)).
8. Most Twitter brawls are a waste of time. A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool ([Prov. 17:10](#)).
9. Don't mess around with trolls. Let a man meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs rather than a fool in his folly ([Prov. 17:12](#)).
10. Seriously, don't get into fights on Twitter. The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out ([Prov. 17:14](#)).
11. Just because you think it, doesn't mean you have to say it. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent ([Prov. 17:28](#)).
12. Get the facts first. If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame ([Prov. 18:13](#)).
13. Don't rush to get your hot take out there as soon as possible. The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him ([Prov. 18:17](#)).
14. Relax, it's probably not a big deal. Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense ([Prov. 19:11](#)).
15. Learn from those who have something to teach. Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future ([Prov. 19:20](#)).
16. There is no shame in ignoring your mentions. It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling ([Prov. 20:3](#)).
17. Think twice (or three or four or five times) before you make a statement or an accusation that could ruin a person's reputation. A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold ([Prov. 22:1](#)).
18. Don't go chasing waterfalls. Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day ([Prov. 23:17](#)).
19. Don't embarrass your Mom and Dad. Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice ([Prov. 23:25](#)).
20. Be concerned if you are happy over bad news. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles ([Prov. 24:17](#)).
21. Haters gonna hate. Fret not yourself because of evildoers, and be not envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future; the lamp of the wicked will be put out ([Prov. 24:19-20](#)).
22. Don't take yourself too seriously. Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him ([Prov. 26:12](#)).
23. Stay out of trouble. Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears ([Prov. 26:17](#)).
24. Don't exaggerate the failings of your enemies or the successes of your friends. A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin ([Prov. 26:28](#)).

25. For heaven's sake, stop retweeting compliments and embedding quotations about your awesomeness. Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips ([Prov. 27:2](#)).

## Owning Your Social Media Habit

By: Tim Challies

Social media: can't live with it, can't live without it. Or that's how it feels. Facebook, Twitter, blogs—I think most of us have a bit of a love/hate relationship with them. While we enjoy the benefits they bring to us, we also see how they seek to dominate our lives. Many of us now live much of life through the lens of our social media, as if we haven't actually experienced something until we've tweeted it or blogged about it or posted pictures of it on Facebook. It's a strange phenomenon. And it's a phenomenon that can quickly and easily dominate our lives.

The big question I ask in my book *The Next Story* is this: do you own your technology or does your technology own you? It's an important question and one we would all do well to wrestle with when it comes to our social media. So let's talk about how we can own our social media habits.

### Quantify It

One very helpful place to begin is with quantifying your social media usage. It is far more likely that you are *underestimating* than *overestimating* the scope of your social media usage. For some reason we seem to have a kind of blindness to the reality of how much we actually use our devices and browse our favorite web sites. It is difficult to accurately measure it, but it is good to at least make the attempt. All of those 15 minute visits to Facebook may add up to several hours a day and many hours a week. When people begin to quantify their television habits they typically underestimate by a couple of hours *per day*. I'm convinced the same is true of social media time.

It's also useful to ask your spouse or your children or your parents. "Am I using my computer too much? Am I on Facebook too much?" Ask them to help you quantify your usage. Even if their assessment is subjective, it is still useful. If your wife says you are using the computer too much, you probably are.

There is no objective answer to the question "How much is too much?" But simply looking at the data can be shocking and revealing—perhaps even humbling and humiliating. So quantify it and ask if you are faithfully redeeming the time given to you.

### Understand It

One of the main reasons I wrote *The Next Story* is that I realized I had a woefully underdeveloped understanding of media and technology. I was not thinking about these things in a distinctly Christian way. It was my own search to remedy this that led me to begin writing a book. The research I did gave me a very helpful understanding of why technology is the way it is. Suddenly a lot of things made a lot of sense. I began to understand why every good technological gift seems to come with an opposite problem. I began to see how even something like a blog or a Facebook account could subtly change me.

So invest the time in seeking to gain a little bit of theoretical knowledge of technology and invest the time in beginning to form a theology of technology. Both of these will pay dividends.

### Create Some Boundaries

You can only have true ownership over your technology if you are willing and able to put some boundaries on it. If you are constantly reacting to your devices—compulsively checking email or mindlessly surfing from blog to blog, your technology has too great a grip on you. So discipline yourself—find ways of putting boundaries on it—and then force yourself to live within these boundaries.

One of the most helpful suggestions I've heard about social media and other technologies is to create a "technology basket." At certain times everyone in the family needs to put their favorite digital device into this

basket and for a couple of hours no one is allowed to access any of them (Be clever about this; if your device is a computer, just put the mouse in the basket—not the whole computer). Another great idea is to plan media-free times. Plan on taking a vacation this summer during which you and your family will be free of all media.

But don't just plan the times you will be free of media; you should also plan when you will use them day to day. Give yourself a specific amount of time in the morning, at lunch, in the evening—whenever!—during which you can use Facebook and read your blogs. And when that time is up, walk away. Without this discipline it is almost inevitable that you will use them more than you should.

### Be Realistic & Get Smart

The Internet is not going away. Neither are Facebook or blogs or Twitter or our other social media sites. Not any time soon, at any rate. So don't just wish they would go away and refuse to learn to use them responsibly. Hiding your head in the sand or surrendering to the inevitable is not living like a Christian.

Realize as well that each of these things brings a never-ending stream of information; you will never be able to read and digest it all. The best plan may be to spend more time on fewer sources of information. Read a few blogs and think about them deeply or interact with them by leaving comments. This may prove more beneficial than skimming a hundred blogs. But through it all realize that you will never be caught up and the information flow will never cease. That feeling of never really being on top of all the information will never go away.

### Enjoy It

Jettisoning all social media may be the solution for some people. But most of us will want to continue to enjoy Facebook and Twitter and all these other media. And there is plenty of room to enjoy them. Believe it or not, Facebook is a good gift of God that we can use to his glory.

But you will be able to enjoy it most when you enjoy it best.

### Six Ways Your Phone Is Changing You

Article by Tony Reinke Topic: Technology

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/six-ways-your-phone-is-changing-you>

Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone at Macworld Expo 2007, and I got my first one a year later. I can't remember life without it.

For seven years an iPhone has always been within my reach, there to wake me in the morning, there to play my music library, there to keep my calendar, there to capture my life in pics and video, there for me to enjoy sling-shooting wingless birds into enemy swine, there as my ever-present portal to Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

My iPhone is such a part of my daily life, I rarely think self-reflectively about it. That's precisely what concerns David Wells, 75, a careful thinker who has watched trends in the church for many decades.

Wells asks Christians to consider the consequences of the smartphone. "What is it doing to our minds when we are living with this constant distraction?" he said recently in an interview. "We are, in fact, now living with a parallel universe, a virtual universe that can take all of the time we have. So what happens to us when we are in constant motion, when we are addicted to constant visual stimulation? What happens to us? That is the big question."

That's a huge question. What is life like now because of the smartphone? How has the iPhone changed us? These self-reflective questions may seem daunting, but we must ask them.

### The Internet Age

Wells is quick to remind us we are only 20 years into this experiment called "The Internet Age" (or "The Information Age"). All of our digital communications technology is relatively new. One day we will stand back

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and look with more precision at what our smartphones are doing to our brains, our hearts, and our souls, but we don't have the leisure to postpone self-reflection for the future. We need to ask ourselves questions now.

We have wise Christian fathers in the faith who are asking important questions, if we're willing to listen. One such man is Dr. Douglas Groothuis, Professor of Philosophy at Denver Seminary. Groothuis has been tracking the impact of the Internet on the spiritual life since he published his book *The Soul in Cyberspace* in 1997.

I recently talked with Groothuis about how our iPhones are changing us. He suggested we think about six areas.

Change 1: We are becoming like what we behold.

At first that statement sounds abstract, but it's one of the most simple (and profound) psychological realities we learn in Scripture: *We become like what we behold*. To worship an idol is to become like the idol; to worship Christ is to become like Christ. Passages in Scripture abound to this end — Psalm 115:4–8, Romans 1:18–27, 12:1–2, Colossians 3:10, and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

What we love to behold is what we worship. What we spend our time *beholding* shapes our hearts and molds us into the people we are. This spiritual truth is frightening and useful, but it raises the questions: What happens to our soul when we spend so much time beholding the glowing screens of our phones? How are we changed? How are we conformed?

One way we become like what we behold shows up relationally, Groothuis warns. Our digital interactions with one another, which are often necessarily brief and superficial, begin to pattern all our relationships. "When you begin to become shallow in your interactions with people, you can become habituated to that." All of our personal interactions take the same shape. The barista at the coffee counter gets a DM-like response. When we hang out with friends, we offer a series of Tweet-like responses in a superficial conversation with little spiritual meaning.

"The way we interact online becomes the norm for how we interact offline. Facebook and Twitter communications are pretty short, clipped, and very rapid. And that is not a way to have a good conversation with someone. Moreover, a good conversation involves listening and timing and that is pretty much taken away with Internet communications, because you are not there with the person. So someone could send you a message and you could ignore it, or someone could send you a message and you get to it two hours later. But if you are in real time in a real place with real bodies and a real voice, that is a very different dynamic. You shouldn't treat another person the way you would interact with Twitter." But we do, if we're not careful.

Change 2: We are ignoring our finiteness.

Fundamentally I am a finite man, severely limited in what I can know and what I can read and what I can engage with and (perhaps most importantly) very limited in what I can really care about. Yet my phone offers me everything — new news, new outrages, new videos, new music, new pictures, and new updates from all my Facebook friends.

One reason we own smartphones is to avoid being left behind. We don't want to miss anything gone viral. We track hashtag trends mostly out of fear of being left out. And little by little we ignore our finiteness, we lose a sense of our limitations, and we begin lusting after the forbidden fruit of limitless knowledge in a subconscious desire to become infinite like God.

"A smartphone absorbs our interest because it is so alluring. It can do so many things. And in a sense it is asking us to do so many things with it," Groothuis said. "But humans are limited. We can only think through so many things at once. We can only feel properly a limited number of things. And these technologies want to stretch us out over the entire globe with Twitter feeds, Facebook messages, and photos shared on Instagram. Instead, we need to embrace our finitude. And if we really own up to our finitude and the fact that a life well lived is a life lived carefully, as Paul says (Ephesians 5:15, Colossians 4:5), we simply have to say 'no' to some of these things."

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Change 3: We are multitasking what should be unitasked.

Habituated to shallow friendships, distracted to limited focus, and ignorant of personal finitude, we embrace the multitasking myth. We multitask everything, trying to think in two directions at the same time, trying to be in two places at the same time, trying to live in physical space and virtual space simultaneously.

This modern temptation explains why Groothuis prohibits his students from using phones and laptops in his classes. “I think we are a very distracted culture. We are trying to multitask things that should not be multitasked — they should be unitasked. And that is what I tell my students: ‘You can’t multitask philosophy.’” The study of philosophy cannot be distracted by tweets. And if not philosophy, how much more should we aim to unitask our study of God and our prayer life?

In reality, Scripture calls us to a life of single-minded self-reflection that often gets thwarted by the hum of multitasking. If it’s important, it’s worth being unitasked. Which means there must be priorities that trump our iPhone push notifications.

Change 4: We are forgetting the joy of embodiment.

The Apostle John closes one of his ancient handwritten letters with a line of enduring relevance for those of us who now write with our thumbs: “Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink [modern technology for John]. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete” (2 John 12).

As Neil Postman suggested, communications technology, like email, is ghost-to-ghost more than person-to-person. There is something of us in an email, but there’s more to our personhood that doesn’t get sent. In an email we send our ghost. The same is true of this blog post. These inescapable limitations of digital communication are rooted in God’s design in creation, said Groothuis.

“Christianity differs from every other religion except Judaism in claiming that the universe is created good. And God puts his blessing on it and God wants fellowship with human beings using the medium of matter. And we have the doctrine of Incarnation. It is something like Jesus turning water into wine — and the best wine — in John 2:1–12. That is embodied, that is people-fellowship, that is enjoying the fruit of the vine, and Jesus blesses that.”

But, I press, why is the Apostle’s own *joy* bound up with embodied fellowship?

“I think it has to do with the engaging of personalities,” Groothuis replied. “Our personality will come through to some extent in an email message or a tweet. But we are holistic beings. We have feelings. We have thoughts. We have imagination. We have bodies. We look different. We express ourselves differently, for example in our tone of voice. How many times have we miscommunicated with someone online because there is no tone of voice? We were joking and someone took it seriously and got offended. Or we say something serious and people think we were joking. So I think the fullness of joy comes with one personality interacting with other personalities in terms of voice, touch, appearance, and timing. Sometimes it is time just to be quiet with people, or to cry with people, or to laugh with people.”

So social media and email (disembodied communication) can be a very useful extension of our embodied relationships, but not a replacement for them. So I ask my introvert self: Are the conveniences of disembodied communication undermining the joy of embodied communication? Do I truly value the personal, face-to-face relationships in my life over the disembodied relationships I maintain online? Are my face-to-face relationships — with my neighbor, my wife, and my kids — suffering because I neglect the priority and joy of embodiment?

Change 5: We are losing interest in the gathered church.

Inevitably, this lost joy of embodiment manifests itself as empty pews on Sunday morning.

Christianity is rooted in Christ’s incarnation and this profound face-to-face reality shapes our fellowship (2 John 12; 3 John 14), our ultimate hopes (1 John 3:2), and our lives before the face of God, *coram Deo*. The

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iPhone offers few advantages here.

“We have the whole dynamic of collective worship, which is very significant biblically because God inhabits the praises of his people (Psalm 22:3). When people come and worship in spirit and in truth there is the presence and dynamic of the Holy Spirit that can’t be repeated though a group Skype call. That will be second best, certainly. The Church, the body of Christ is to meet. We are to be with each other and we are to worship together and confess our sins and have communion and embrace people and show our love for people and weep with those who weep and laugh with those who laugh.”

If we prioritize *disembodied* relationships we overlook the profound embodied realities happening in baptism, in the Lord’s Supper, in corporate musical worship, in the laying on of hands, and even in sermons. As Pastor John has explained in the past, a recorded sermon in the earbuds cannot replace embodied sermons in the pew because preaching is “expository exaltation,” an integral part of the gathered corporate worship experience, embedded in the gathered people. There among the gathered people of God “preaching comes into its own as an encounter with the living God” (APJ 297).

So do we truly value the embodied reality of the local church? And even if we show up on Sunday, are we checking out, fiddling on our phones, and looking for something more promising, more entertaining, more disembodied, than the joy of God offered in embodied fellowship?

Change 6: We are growing careless with our words.

Compounded from all these online issues, we grow careless with words.

Why are we so quick to judge the motives of people online, and why are we so bold to criticize others? Why do we say things online we would never say in person? Why does digital communication draw our scorn so easily?

I was eager to ask Groothuis this question, and he responded by returning again to disembodiment. At a profound level, when we interact with people online, we are quick to forget these are souls, quick to forget “we are interacting with eternal beings,” he said. Disembodiment — distracted minds trying to multitask — makes our language especially flippant and potentially over-critical.

“We need to have integrity when we are online. We should do it prayerfully. We need to resist impulses. And I don’t always successfully do this. I have deleted not a few Facebook posts,” he said. “But remember that we are doing this before the face of God and we are interacting with eternal beings. We are having an effect on people’s destinies, even through a Twitter message. I think if we take that kind of approach it gives us a sense of gravitas and we are less likely to become flippant. Glibness and flippancy are terrible vices in our age. So many times in Scripture we are told to be careful with our words. Proverbs says this over and over again. We are told to be careful how we speak and let our words be few (Proverbs 10:19–21; 17:27). These technologies allow us to talk endlessly. It may not be the physical voice, but it is some kind of message.”

“I think we need to edit ourselves more,” he said, “and realize that mediated communication has tremendous benefits, but detriments as well.”