

CHRISTIAN **Vol. 23 No. 2**
counseling
TODAY

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Mark and Debbie Laaser

**The Big Disconnect:
Technology and Relationships**

W. Jesse Gill

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For I know the plans I have for you, "declares the Lord."
Plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

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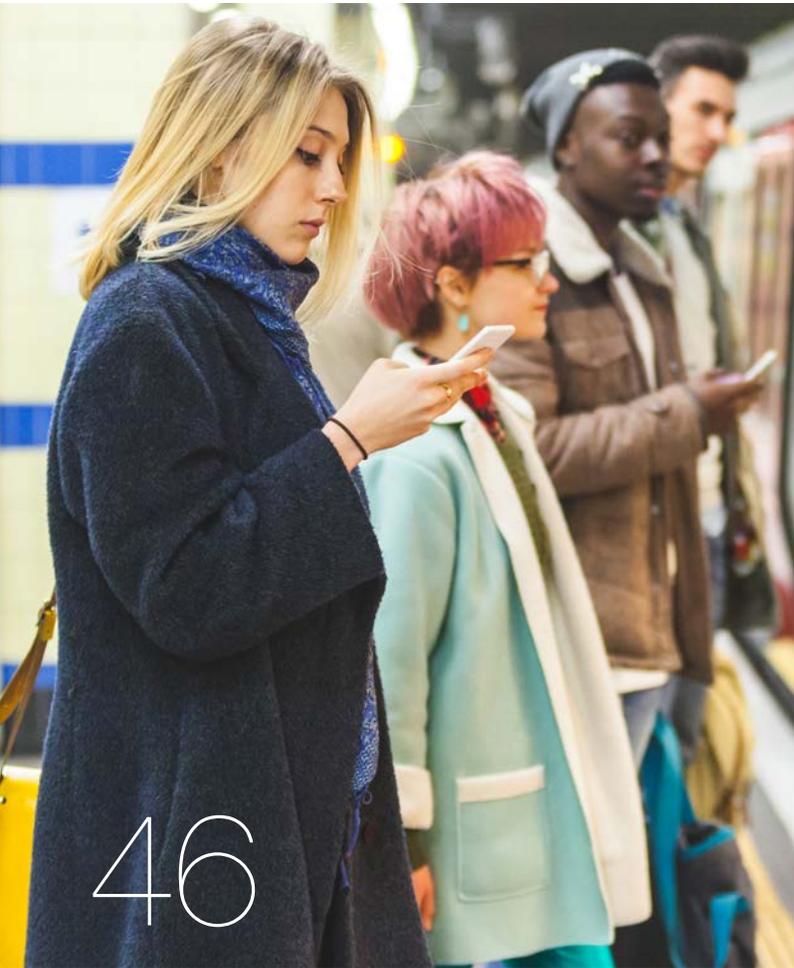
10 Is Technology Stealing Your Brain? *by Daniel Amen.* Brain expert, Dr. Daniel Amen, addresses the dynamics of distraction and how the brain's pleasure centers are worn out due to the constant barrage of technology. While offering opportunities for increased connection between people, "gadget addiction" also isolates users. Brain health strategies can help sustain needed balance.

17 Secondhand Screen Time and its Influence on a Child's Brain *by Joshua Straub.* According to neuroscience researchers, the constant, attention-seeking demands of our cell phones have created a state of "continuous partial attention." For busy and stressed out parents, digital "babysitters" can become a tempting option. Joshua Straub offers pragmatic steps and guidelines to help bring greater stability into the home environment.

20 Violent Video End Games *by Gregory Jantz.* The debate continues on the long-term correlation between violent video games and increased aggression, especially among adolescents and young adults. While there are some addictive factors involved due to higher levels of adrenaline, Gregory Jantz also tackles issues related to social isolation, emotional desensitization, and a gamer's sense of significance.

26 Cyberbullying: An Old Enemy Gets a New, Terrifying Face *by Paul Asay.* Increased cell phone use and other social media platforms have led to an alarming rise in cyberbullying and, in some cases, even suicide. Paul Asay shares how greater connectivity comes with a heavy price for those being bullied. He also suggests practical tips for increasing support systems to ameliorate ongoing harassment.





46 Unplugged or Undone? Technology, Mental Health, and Wellness by Eric Scalise.

Living in a fast-paced, push-button, instant-everything world that is increasingly fueled by technology can have adverse consequences when it comes to one's overall mental health and well-being. Eric Scalise reviews some of the current research in this area and also presents a biblically-based response.

50 Technology: The Impact on Your Career or Business by Dwight Bain.

Advances in technology are having a growing effect within the workplace and, in some instances, beginning to replace human operators. This includes the world of mental health counseling and life coaching. Dwight Bain reviews recent trends and industry standards and how caregivers can maximize their services without compromising relational factors.



34 Sexting: Laws, Issues, and Minors by Jenna Ellis. Cell phone use among minors has resulted in higher incidences of sexting, which often looms at the forefront of parental concerns, legislative actions, and criminal justice efforts. Attorney, Jenna Ellis, helps define terminology, current statutes that are in place, and some of the legal realities for both adults and minors who choose to cross this line.

38 Online Pornography and the Loss of Marital Intimacy by Mark and Debbie Laaser. Pornography in all its forms has become a national epidemic, and advances in technology over the past two decades have only exacerbated this growing national crisis. Mark and Debbie Laaser examine the physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual impact of pornography and sexual addiction, along with prevention and intervention measures.

43 The Big Disconnect: Technology and Relationships by W. Jesse Gill. The critically important attachment bonding process that takes place throughout our formative years is under assault in today's digital age. Jesse Gill looks at overall relational well-being, as well as some of the negative outcomes that frequently result from increased screen time among children and teens.

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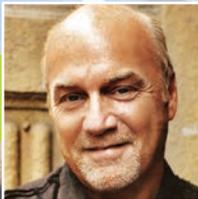


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and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
— Isaiah 60:1*

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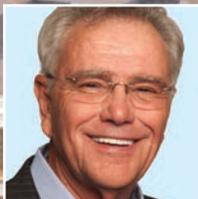
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Technology: Ideal or Idol?



We live in such a complex, rapidly changing, and advancing world where today's technology practically seems like tomorrow's museum piece. Forget *carpe diem*; we want *carpe mañana*. However, the complex creativity, technological marvels, smart devices, and other “must have” items also come with a hefty price. They can compromise our overall well-being, bombard our senses with information overload, and diminish our emotional, physical, and relational health. People used to say that the television was the great “disconnecter.” In a way, that's still true... the screen size has just gotten a lot smaller.

For most millennials and younger, the home personal computer has practically gone the way of the dinosaur. In fact, many have also

stopped using laptops and iPads[®] altogether, opting instead for increasingly sophisticated smart phones. In a recent *Fortune* magazine article, the author identified several significant technology trends for 2018. These included the transition from a concept called the Internet of Things (IoT)—smart sensors connected to devices that function as digital assistants—to a new interface referred to as BIoT, which is the combination of IoT with Blockchain (an underlying technology that creates databases of digital records across hundreds of thousands of computers). Another innovation mentioned is Fintech, an emerging technology used to support or enable banking and financial services, especially through cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin. By the way, this is one of the fastest growing areas for venture capitalists today. A

third predicted trend is something referred to as augmented reality. Here, phone screens are moved to a Heads Up Display (HUD) embedded in eyeglasses, much like a typical military pilot would utilize within an aircraft's avionics.

On this last point... is an “augmented” reality better than the real thing? Is an artificial sunrise more moving or meaningful than one experienced in real time? Will cyber relationships with an artificial bot (think Siri, Alexa, Cortana, etc.) become more desired than face-to-face interactions with a physically present human being? These are important questions and ones that mental health practitioners and life coaches have to grapple with on an increasing basis. How should we respond to the current trends that are beginning to dominate the landscape? The following Most Watched Today Web link (yes, we know... we are using technology) offers a poignant and disconcerting look at the cultural shifts that have taken place across successive generations: <https://www.mostwatchedtoday.com/nature-valley-rediscover-nature/>.

This latest issue of *CCT* tackles the dynamics of technology, as well as the myriad concerns arising from the Internet and a cellphone-permeated environment. Noted brain expert, Dr. Daniel Amen, gets us started by examining what he refers to as “gadget addiction” and what happens to the brain's pleasure centers. Joshua Straub focuses a little deeper on the developing brains of children and minors. Both offer strategies and guidelines for more balanced living. Sadly, technological innovation also has a darker side. Gregory Jantz discusses

the impact of violent video games and potential long-term risks, while Paul Asay addresses one of those risks when it manifests in the form of cyberbullying. Attorney, Jenna Ellis, offers a sobering discussion on the legal aspects of sexting as it relates to child pornography laws. Mark and Debbie Laaser tackle online pornography addiction and the devastation it creates within marriages. Jesse Gill and Eric Scalise look at the overarching theme of relational disconnection and the slow, but exacting, toll technology has on one's emotional and mental health and functionality. Finally, Dwight Bain speaks to the growing presence of technology within the workplace and the potential for reduced job roles and services being provided by actual workers.

Without a doubt, technology and

the Internet have opened up some incredible doors. They have allowed us to accomplish more, and in less time, than at any point in history. Yet, there are numerous pitfalls and potential problems where we must remain attuned or risk falling into an electronic abyss. The Genesis story beautifully recounts how we were created in relationship, through relationship, and for relationship—both with God and fellow man. The challenge in the midst of rapidly expanding technologies is to never lose sight of our God-given DNA. During a storm-related, multi-day, electrical blackout that significantly impacted the middle-Atlantic states several years ago, millions of people had to contend with the disruption of normal communication, Internet access, and technological necessities. Many rediscovered conversations

on the front porch and around the dinner table by candlelight... all without television, texting, tweeting, or running to read the last three dozen Facebook® posts.

So... when you're done reading this issue, why not simply pause for reflection... take a long walk and leave your cell phone behind... have an undistracted conversation... share a meal with a good friend or loved one... or get reacquainted with a favorite book (the paper kind). And don't forget to look up and around at God's creation instead of down at the device that normally rests in your hand that has been given far too much control and power over your life. Perhaps there should be a passage of Scripture that says, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his phone for his friends!" ✨



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IS TECHNOLOGY STEALING YOUR BRAIN?



Have you ever walked into a room where everyone was staring at their smartphones? Has your spouse or significant other ever spent more time checking his or her social media feed during a family dinner than talking to you and your kids? Have you ever seen people texting while driving? It's happening more and more each day.

In 2011, only 35% of Americans owned a smartphone, but that number has already more than doubled to 77%, according to Pew Research... and among 18-29-year-olds, an astounding 94% have a smartphone. Although technology has improved our lives in profound ways, it has also presented a growing number of unique challenges. Increasing dependence on handheld devices, tablets, and computers is impacting our brains, cognitive function, relationships, and overall mental health.

Attention Robbers

Ping! Beep! Brrringggg! With all the alerts and notifications we get on our tech gadgets, it's no surprise we get distracted. Unfortunately, when the flashing and vibrating occur while you are in the middle of an important task, it leads to poorer performance. A 2015 study in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* found that even if you do not actually read that e-mail or text, just the momentary distraction downgrades your ability to complete the task at hand.

For people who are media multi-taskers—toggling between multiple social media sites, e-mail, texting, and more—the impact of all that attention shifting could be even worse. It could be causing structural changes in the brain that may lead to long-lasting attentional issues. In a review of the current research, a pair of scientists from France and the United Kingdom found that frequent media multi-taskers have reduced gray matter in the anterior cingulate cortex, an important brain region for attentional control.

Wearing Out the Brain's Pleasure Centers

Text messaging, e-mail, video games, social media, television, and multiple devices can overstimulate the brain's pleasure centers in the same way cocaine does. For many people, the ping signaling a new incoming message, breaking news alerts on the Internet, high-intensity action TV shows (think *Game of Thrones*) or video games cause a release of dopamine (a primary neurotransmitter that impacts reward seeking and motivational processes). When dopamine is excessively high for prolonged periods, the brain's pleasure centers—the ventral tegmental area, nucleus accumbens, and basal ganglia—become less responsive.

In short, our devices, online communities, games, and TV-watching habits are wearing out our pleasure centers and changing our brains. Our fast-paced, pleasure-seeking lifestyle is robbing us of the ability to experience joy from the simple things in life. The excessive pursuit of constant thrills may contribute to emotional problems, health issues, and addictions. In fact, as video game and technology usage goes up, so do depression and obesity, according to research in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

DANIEL G. AMEN

Gadget Addiction

Addiction has been known to ruin lives, relationships, and bank accounts. Some people assume addiction must be tied to a particular chemical substance such as alcohol or opiates, but it is actually rooted much deeper than that, straight into your brain. In an iPass study involving 1,700 people from North America and Europe, researchers found that 40% of participants considered Wi-Fi their first priority for luxury or necessity, followed by sex at 37%, chocolate at 14%, and alcohol at 9%.

Most people with addiction issues have coexisting conditions, such as bipolar disorder, anxiety, depression, or attention deficit disorder (ADD). The chances of relapsing or developing a secondary addiction are much higher with underlying brain dysfunction. Addiction is most successfully treated when simultaneously treating the coexisting conditions. With more than 23 million Americans facing addiction issues, it is more important than ever to accept that addiction is a brain disease, not a personal weakness.

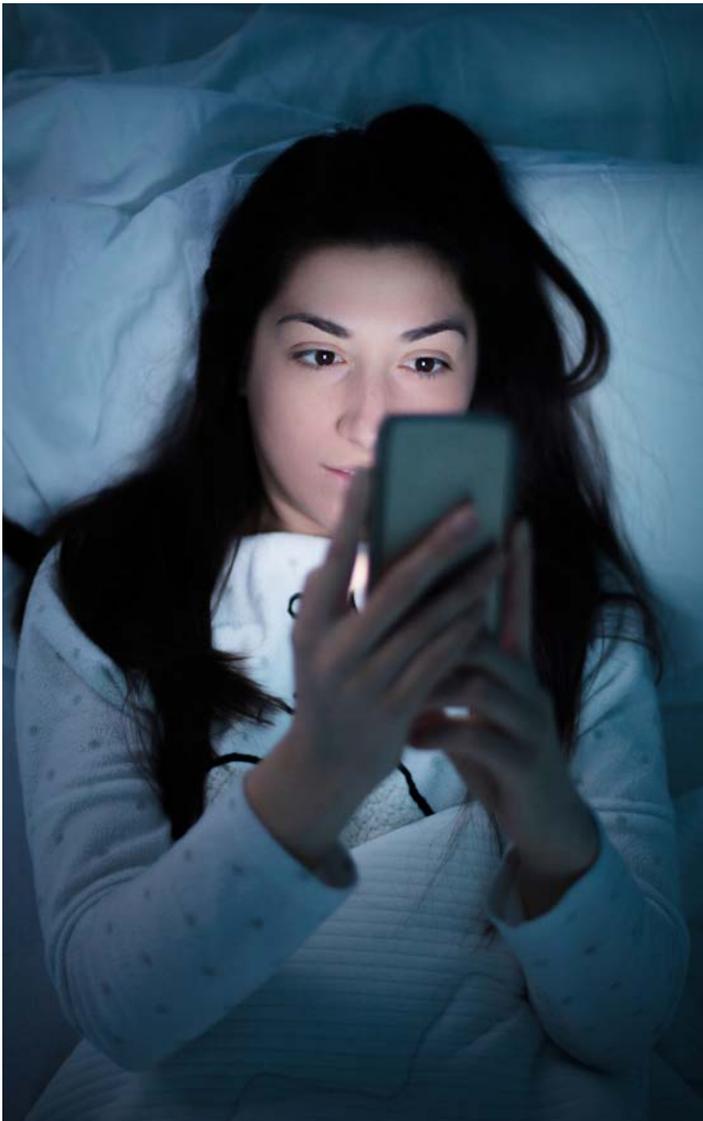
Great Connector or Isolator?

Social media platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram are all intended to help keep us connected. However, in many cases, they are having the opposite effect. A growing body of scientific evidence suggests a link between spending extended amounts of time on social media and negative feelings. A team of researchers at the University of Pittsburgh has been taking a deep dive into the effects of social media on mental health. And the news is not good. In a series of studies, the researchers have found that heavy use of social media sites is connected to social isolation, depression, and anxiety in young adults.

The Cognitive Crutch

Can you remember the name of the actor who was in the movie you saw last Saturday? If you are like an increasing number of people, you won't even bother to try to reach into your brain's archives to recall. You will simply grab your phone and look it up. This pervasive habit has been coined, the "Google Effect"... and it is taking a toll on our memories.

In a 2011 study, participants were asked to learn a series of trivia facts and type them into a computer. Half of them were told the computer would store the information for them and they could access it later. The other



half believed the data would be deleted. When the researchers asked them to recall the information, who do you think did a better job? Here's a hint: it was not the people who thought they would be able to retrieve the stored data. Other research is showing that our reliance on technology and media multi-tasking is diminishing our working memory capacity, as well as our long-term memory function. Considering 5.7 million Americans are currently living with Alzheimer's disease, and that number is projected to hit 14 million by 2050, we definitely do not need to engage in activity that is going to steal our memories.

A Third Wheel

Is that smartphone getting between you and your romantic partner? It is called, "technoference," and emerging evidence shows it can lower relationship and life satisfaction. In a 2015 study in the journal, *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, the majority of participants said TVs, smartphones, tablets, and computers frequently interrupted mealtimes, leisure time, and conversations with their romantic partners.

Our phones get in the way of our friendships, too. British researchers performed two experiments to see how cell phones impacted face-to-face interactions. In both trials, the mere presence of a phone on a table between two people negatively impacted feelings of closeness, connection, and conversation quality.

Losing ZZZZ's

According to healthfinder.gov, as many as 70 million Americans have trouble sleeping, and the problem is getting worse with the proliferation of tech gadgets. Sleep problems increase your risk of developing psychiatric disorders. A Harvard Health Publishing newsletter states that people who suffer from insomnia are four times more likely to develop major depression compared to those with healthy sleeping patterns. Sleep problems lead to anxiety disorders more than 25% of the time and depression more than 67% of the time.

Skimping on sleep can affect your health in more ways than you might imagine. Getting less than six hours of sleep each night has been associated with lower overall brain activity, which affects productivity, physical safety, and maintaining a healthy weight. When you miss out on sleep, your brain pays the price.

To prevent the negative effects associated with technology-induced disorders, try the following brain-healthy strategies.

- **Take a tech timeout.** Establish a time when all devices will be turned off for the remainder of the evening. Not only will this provide a break from texting, browsing the Internet, and posting content on social media, it will also afford you the opportunity to spend more quality time with friends and family.
- **Schedule weekly Internet fasts.** A great way to curb the adverse effects of digital obsession is to reserve one day of the week (for maximum effect, choose a day you have off from work) for an Internet fast. Rather than sitting around staring at a screen all day, spend some time working on a hobby, engaging in physical activity, or enjoying the beauty of the great outdoors.
- **Create a technology-free bedroom.** One of the best ways to avoid the dangers of digital dependence is to remove TVs, computers, and other electronic devices from your bedroom. Creating a relaxing, distraction-free environment may facilitate better sleep and increase intimacy with your partner.
- **Follow the “one screen at a time” rule.** To prevent your attention from being divided by multiple devices, use only one screen at a time. This should aid your ability to focus, while also giving your overstimulated brain some much needed downtime.
- **Use your brain, not your computer.** Our reliance on our brains to remember facts and problem solve has significantly diminished due to the “Google Effect.” Before you reach for your phone or ask Siri, try to recall information using your brain.
- **Never talk and text.** Keep phone and text conversations to a minimum when you are with other people. Even better, put your phone out of sight.
- **Protect your pleasure centers.** Connect meaningful activities and pleasure, such as volunteering for endeavors you love. Seek pleasure in the little things in your life, such as a walk with a friend, holding hands with your spouse, a great meal or a meaningful church service.
- **Boost dopamine naturally.** Eat foods that contain dopamine-boosting properties, such as chicken, turkey, seafood, almonds, pumpkin and sesame seeds, turmeric, oregano, vegetables (for folate and magnesium), olive oil, and green tea. Consider supplements to support dopamine, such as omega-3 fatty acids, S-Adenosyl-L-Methionine (SAME), or green tea extract. ✖

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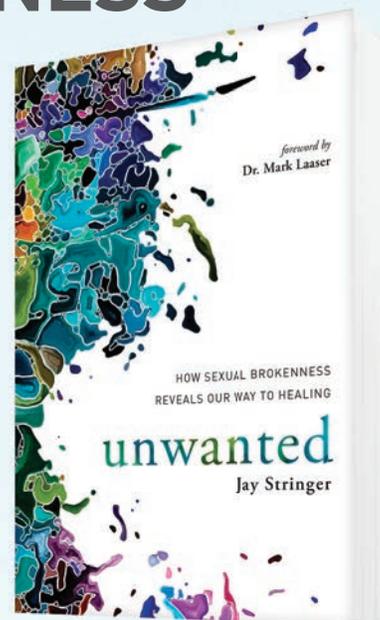


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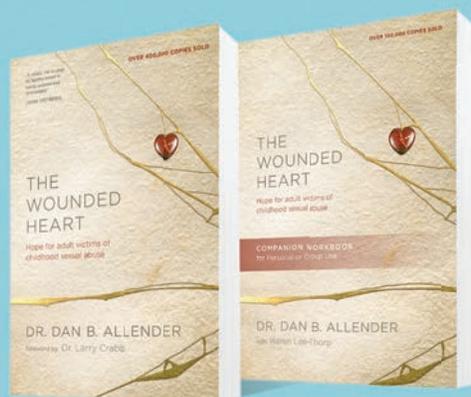
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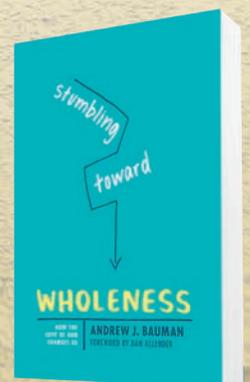


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Secondhand Screen Time and its Influence on a Child's Brain

Think with me about your clients... or for that matter, yourself.
You just finished browsing Pinterest after getting the recipe you needed. You put your phone down to set out the ingredients. Your daughter is sitting in her highchair wanting some more applesauce.
A text comes in. Your pregnant sister is asking if you like the stroller you use for your kids. You begin to respond, only to receive an incoming call from your husband. He reminds you about the get-together tonight at his coworker's house. You go to Instagram to see who else may be going and decide to message a friend to see what she's wearing.
In the meantime, your daughter's ear-piercing scream for more applesauce finally grabs your attention. You put your phone down to help her, but quickly pick it back up to text a few possible babysitters for tonight.

Neuroscience researchers have a term for our clinging reactions to the constant attention-seeking demands of our phones—we live in a state of “continuous partial attention.” What does that mean? It means we rarely pay full attention to any one task, to the neglect of all others. In a society where we, on average, tap, swipe or touch our phones 2,617 times a day, it's no wonder we cannot part ways.¹ With notifications tailgating our every move, our stress levels are heightened and attention spans diminishing—especially in the presence of our kids.

Go ahead. Sit yourself down at the lunch table in your daughter's shoes and begin asking for more applesauce. How do you think she feels about mom's “continuous partial attention” to her? Or better yet, remind yourself how it felt the last time you tried to get your spouse's attention from his or her phone.

JOSHUA STRAUB



Our relationship with our devices—much like the secondhand smoke elicited by a smoker—may be impacting our children more deeply than we realize. One such study² recently found that distracted parental attention may have more damaging effects on our babies' cognitive development than once thought, especially their ability to process pleasure. Translation: If I, as a dad working from home, am consistently distracted by my phone when my children are expecting me to play, feed or otherwise enjoy time with them, it could wire their brains for interruptions, causing a poorly developed pleasure system. Such interruptions, if consistent over time, can lead to anxiety and depression in our children.

Our children want and need their parents more than anything else on the planet—especially in those first few years of life. If research shows that our inability to put the phone down is wiring our kids' brains in such harmful ways, we have a huge lesson to learn as a society. Children deserve to know that they are more important than our phones.

What is the Real Cost of Our Digital Babysitters?

If the secondhand screen time of a parent can suppress the pleasure system of a child in the early years, that's scary enough... yet, what happens when we also give them devices at an early age?

Speaking across the United States and Canada, I am encountering teachers and child educators in increasing numbers who are voicing their concerns about the lack of preparedness and increased entitlement in children in their preschool years. Here are two of the most recent comments.

"In the past two to three years, I'm seeing increasingly more kindergartners coming into my classroom who lack the fine motor skills to hold a crayon or use a pair of scissors."

– Kindergarten teacher, 16 years experience, Indiana

"The lack of respect and increased entitlement among kids in the past three to four years make me glad I'm retiring. I didn't encounter these issues in previous decades. And it's not just the kids. The parental disrespect toward the teacher is even worse."

– 1st grade teacher, 30+ years experience, Ontario, Canada

These teachers are not alone. In a recent British study³ of more than 1,100 school leaders, nearly every leader (99.5%) said a proportion of their students are joining school below the level of school-readiness. When asked the reasons they believe students are underprepared, the top three given were:

1. Lack of social skills (79%)
2. Delayed speech (78%)
3. Deficient self-help skills/resilience (69%)

Educators blame the impact of technology for these results. In the study, one primary school leader said, "... parents are more often to be seen on their phones than talking to their children." As a dad of a four and six-year-old, what I am hearing from teachers and seeing in the research concerns me for the generation of children we are raising.

Helping Parents

How can we help parents decrease the amount of time children experience "continuous partial attention" (i.e., secondhand screen time) in their presence? In addition to psychoeducation, consider these practical steps:

- **Set only certain times of the day to check e-mail or social media.** If you have scheduled times when you check e-mail or social media, you won't be so tempted to constantly pick up the phone in front of your children. Also, turn off notifications altogether. Notifications do not care about your children.
- **Set specific playtimes when no phones are allowed.** You know those times when you really want to talk to your spouse, but he or she is nose deep in the phone? Imagine that feeling—times a hundred—for your children who are dependent on your attention for brain growth. Set aside a minimum of 20 minutes of command-free playtime each day where phones are nowhere in sight.
- **No phones at mealtimes.** Research shows that the positive benefits of telling stories and talking to one another over dinner is beyond plentiful. Our devices are not placemats. Our children are not invisible; don't let them feel like they are. There will come a day when you'll want to talk to them but, by then, you'll be invisible.
- **If you work from home, make sure you are clear with your children when you are working and when it's playtime.** Whether it's closing the doors or putting up a sign, set an expectation for your kids where they learn to differentiate between work and play.

- **Encourage and teach independent play apart from a screen.** Research consistently shows that too much screen time increases inattention in kids and produces the opposite outcome we are actually looking for—a child who needs persistent stimulation to play on his or her own.⁴ In addition, constant amusement—or not allowing our kids to be bored⁵—inhibits their creativity and imagination.⁶

Getting our kids to play on their own so we can have some time for ourselves is not selfish. In fact, research shows it leads to self-confidence, creativity, and language development in children. And if you are like me, you may have to physically put your phone in another room once playtime begins so they—and you—do not confuse the two. This way, *you won't interrupt their play.*

Continuous partial attention is not only making us anxious, it is making our kids anxious, too. Help parents separate their tasks... and not only will they be more productive with work, their kids will also learn that they are worthy of full, undivided attention. ✖



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VIOLENT VIDEO END GAMES



End game – the point at which the outcome of a game becomes apparent.

For some, we have reached an “end game” where violent video games—like first-person shooter, car theft or war-related content—are concerned. Presidents, from Bill Clinton to Barack Obama to Donald Trump, have referenced violent video games after school shootings. The assumption has been if video games are violent and someone who plays those games becomes violent, then the reason must be the video games—a tragic example of the transitive property: if $a = b$ and $b = c$, then $a = c$.

However, does that assumption always add up? Sandy Hook shooter, Adam Lanza (who tragically took the lives of 20 children and six adults), for example, did play violent video games, including *School Shooting*, but there was one video game that captured hours of Lanza’s attention. In months prior to the shooting, he traveled to a movie theater on weekends to play a specific game for anywhere from four to 10 hours a day. Was it *Call of Duty*? *Halo*? *Grand Theft Auto*? No, it was *Dance, Dance Revolution*.¹

Some experts, like the American Pediatric Association, believe a definitive link exists with not just violent video games, but also media violence in general.² The American Psychological Association’s position differentiates between aggression, violence, and lethal violence, concluding that, “... all violence, including lethal violence, is aggression, but not all aggression is violence.... Insufficient research has examined whether violent video game use causes lethal violence.”³

The debate will continue as more research is done regarding the connection between violent video games and violent behavior.⁴ While policy makers and politicians, researchers, and scientists focus on violence, I am concerned about a wide variety of negative effects that playing these types of games can produce, especially in pre-teen or adolescent gamers.

Social Isolation

I have heard the arguments that gamers can be highly social, interacting for hours with others in a game. Gamers can, and do, interact with other gamers, but those can be a small subset of people, including those who are “virtual.” Pre-teens and adolescents need real-world exposure to people of different ages and interests to learn necessary social skills. With the advent of technology, children may already be compromising an ability to read and interpret facial expressions.⁵

Emotional Desensitization

There is research that points to the potential for players of violent video games to experience emotional desensitization with repeated use.⁶ Repeated exposure to stimuli does help to desensitize an individual to those stimuli. With violent video games, the stimuli being desensitized include empathy, compassion, and a sense of remorse, albeit with virtual characters. There appears to be a lingering effect of this desensitization that transfers to real-life individuals.⁷

“Flow”

An article from *The New Yorker* about violent video games discusses “flow” from psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and says flow is “a condition of absolute presence and happiness... where personal identity becomes subsumed in the game and the player attains a strong feeling of control. Flow eventually becomes self-reinforcing: the feeling itself inspires you to keep returning to the activity that caused it.”⁸ When a gamer is in the highly engaging “flow” of a violent video game, is it any wonder that gamer has trouble extricating him or herself back into the real-world of homework, household chores or family obligations?

Significance

Working with gamers and worried parents, I have found video games offer a place where some of these kids feel strong, competent, and in control. Typically, these are not descriptions most pre-teens or adolescents would assign themselves; yet, these are feelings they desperately want to experience. Instead, they find themselves adrift, navigating the swirling emotional, physical, and relational waters of middle and high school. Placing oneself in the

GREGORY L. JANTZ



flow of a violent video game, with the emotional release of eviscerating an “enemy,” can be extremely appealing and attractive. In the real-world of gym class, algebra, and the mall after school, they feel like a zero... but in the virtual-world, they feel like a hero.

Physical Consequences

Often, violent video games are packed with virtual action only. The brain, or at least parts of the brain, is exercised, but the body is not. Adrenaline, as a strong stimulant hormone, may be flowing from playing the game, but the body has no way to expend it. Parents have complained to me of their kids emerging exhausted and irritable from playing these consuming games, having sat for hours but without enough energy to even go outside. Some have reported eyestrain and headaches because of the intense concentration often required.

Study on the physical effects of violent video gaming has emerged regarding neural hardwiring. From an article in *PC Gamer*: “The four-year study, which tracked groups of 18 to 30-year-olds, found that those who played first-person games for more than six hours per week showed a reduction of grey matter in the hippocampus, the part of the brain that plays a role in the consolidation of information from short-term to long-term memories, as well as spatial memory, which is used for navigation and spatial orientation.”⁹ The brain, as a dynamic organ, fortifies what is used and tends to atrophy what is not. Spending concentrated time on one activity could potentially create difficulty engaging in other activities as effectively.

Addictive Tendencies

For years, researchers have known the traits of addictive behaviors: obsession with the activity; thinking about the activity when not engaged in the activity; an inability to cut down or stop; irritability or depression when not engaged in the activity; hiding when or how long engaged in the activity; choosing the activity over important obligations or commitments; refusal to cut down or stop in the face of negative effects; minimizing or denying the negative influence and/or effects of the activity; and using the activity as a way to cope with negative emotions or circumstances. For some pre-teens and adolescents, the powerful draw of violent video games gives those games enormous potential to overwhelm and create this type of addiction.

In this brave new world of technology, I certainly do not have the answer to every situation, but I can offer some general guidelines I have given to parents:

- Decide, ahead of being asked, what types of games you will allow, not only at home, but also with your child’s friends.
- Set limits on the amount of time for gaming.
- Allow gaming only in “public” areas of the house, and in the proximity to others.
- Pay attention to what is happening in the game and engage your pre-teen or adolescent in conversation about the game.
- Play the game with your pre-teen or adolescent; show interest, not judgement.
- Be alert to your child’s overall demeanor and moods.
- Listen and watch for words or actions that show

distress, such as outbursts of anger, frustration or periods of sullen silence or depression.

- If you have a concern, ask for feedback on your child from a teacher, pastor, school counselor or other adult in your child's life.
- If you are still worried, seek professional support.

When it comes to violent video games, I find the words of Paul, a man who lived thousands of years before technology was even conceived, to hold the best advice: *"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything"* (1 Corinthians 6:12, ESV). ✕

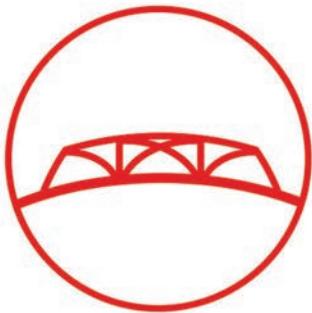


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Networking, and can be heard weekly with Dr. Tim Clinton on Life, Love, and Family.

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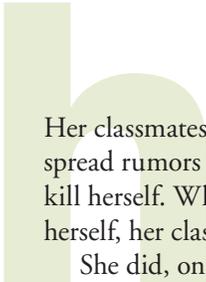




CYBERBULLYING:

An Old Enemy Gets a New, Terrifying Face

Her friends called her Gabbie. Gabriella Green had just moved to a different state and started attending a new school—Surfside Middle School in Panama City, Florida. However, not everyone was happy to see her there, and the 12-year-old struggled to fit in. Before long, she was the subject of harassing texts and mean-spirited memes. According to an interview with her parents on Good Morning America, one manipulated, online picture even showed Gabbie with a gun pointed to her head.¹



Her classmates told her, online and off, that no one liked her. They threatened to spread rumors about her behavior. Some suggested that she should just go ahead and kill herself. When she admitted to a classmate over a videochat that she tried to hang herself, her classmate told her, “If you’re going to do it, just do it.”

She did, on January 10, 2018. Her parents thought she was getting ready for church. Though authorities say that cyberbullying was not the sole cause of Gabbie’s death, two, 12-year-old students were charged with cyberstalking in the aftermath.

Insta-slam

A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), released in June 2018, found that suicide rates across the country have been rising at an alarming rate. Every state but one (Nevada) saw a rise in its suicides between 1999 and 2016,² including a staggering 57% jump in North Dakota.³ According to the study, suicide is now the 10th leading cause of death in the United States.

However, among youth, the trends are even more disconcerting. Another CDC study found that suicide rates among youth from age 10 to 17 rose a staggering 70% between 2006 and 2016.⁴ And while many experts note that rarely is there a single reason behind a suicide, many maintain those rates have coincided with a rise in another troubling issue: cyberbullying.⁵

“Social media is clearly making everything worse,” says Joannie DeBrito, Director of Parenting and Youth for Focus on the Family, who has been working as a practicing mental health professional for more than 30 years. Among girls and women, cyberbullying can be an especially tempting way to harass or demean others. “With females, it’s all about relationship,” DeBrito says. “Men fight with their physical bodies. Their bullying, and their online bullying, is much more about intimidation—making threats, homophobic comments, that kind of thing. With women, it’s psychological and emotional abuse, whether it’s online or offline.” According to DeBrito, they spread gossip, make up stories, and marshal support among their peers to ostracize someone else. “A lot of female suicidal ideation is linked to cyberbullying. When [female bullies] can hide behind a screen, they can say anything. They can re-post pictures. They have [all] these weapons they can use.”

Yet, while the smartphone and social media would seem to be particularly primed for female harassers, boys and men can use it just as effectively, and it can be just as damaging and deadly. “I believe there is a direct correlation [between cyberbullying and suicidal ideation],” says Ken Pott, a Colorado-based marriage-and-family counselor for Transition Counseling. “I have worked with at least two male clients who have been cyberbullied and resorted to threats of suicide almost immediately. Both were placed on 72-hour mental health evaluation holds and came out struggling as to what to do next or [how to] handle the bullying going forward.”



While girls may utilize the weapons of cyberbullying more efficiently, Pott believes that they may have more resources to deal with it, too. They tend to be better at talking through feelings and “self-regulating,” he says. “I found boys to be less emotionally regulated and much more reactive to bullying, to the point of suicidal ideation or physical harm to others.” Nevertheless, as Gabbie’s story—and countless others—suggests, the effects of cyberbullying can always cross gender lines.

The Changing Face of Bullying

Bullying itself, of course, is nothing new. Kids and teens have been bullied ever since there have been kids and teens. And very often, online harassment and abuse are accompanied by real-world bullying. However, cyberbullying has brought an alarming new dimension to the party. Before the advent of social media and the smartphone, kids and teens might have found a relatively safe haven at home. Playground bullies seldom tracked their victims to the front door and hardly ever joined family dinners.

Yet, social media has changed all of that. Instagram®, Facebook®, Snapchat®, and a legion of other online social outlets have made it possible to connect with friends, acquaintances, and crushes in more ways—and with more frequency—than ever before. Teens check their phones first thing in the morning and the last thing at night... and a disturbing number sleep with them.⁶ A full 45% of Ameri-

can teens say they are online “almost constantly,” according to a 2018 Pew Research study.⁷

Even though connectivity can be wonderful in many ways, it also opens the door to the possibility of nearly constant harassment and bullying. Forget bullies stopping at the front door—now they are carried right into the bedroom. “I would hear clients talk about how they were being cyberbullied or victimized online,” DeBrito says. “I would sometimes tell them that there is one solution, and that would be to turn off their computers and cell phones.”

DeBrito also notes that, for today’s youth, it’s not so easy. “We have to remember that their entire lives are tied to their cellphones,” she says. “If there’s an activity going on at a youth group in church, that’s how they notify the kids. They don’t call them anymore or send e-mails... they’re in a Facebook group.” Pott agrees. “For kids, social media is their community... they could be lost and bored [without it].”

Lasting Impacts

However, that connectivity comes with a heavy price for those being bullied. According to stopbullying.gov, bullied kids tend to be more anxious and depressed than their peers, and those issues can extend well into adulthood. They also report changes in sleeping and eating patterns, and school performance suffers.⁸ Studies have shown that both traditional bullying and cyberbullying raise suicidal tendencies.⁹ One report from the United Kingdom found



that victims of cyberbullying may be twice as likely to be suicidal as their peers.¹⁰

DeBrito indicates some of those impacts can be mitigated if a victim's real-world connections are strong enough. "A lot of it depends on what kind of support system a person has to begin with," she says. DeBrito's own children were bullied, "but because they had a good support system at home, and a pretty good sense of self... we kind of moved beyond it. However, if you're someone who's already disenfranchised, who isn't connected at home, who doesn't have connections with parents, or siblings, or good friends, [and] maybe you're already dealing with other mental health issues... it can leave long-term scars for people."

Naturally, DeBrito believes that developing a good, strong support system around a child is critical in combatting cyberbullying—and that includes putting parents on notice about the messages *they* might be unintentionally sending their children. "Most parents want to be the best parents they can be, but sometimes we do things that eat away at our kids' sense of identity or self-esteem unintentionally," says DeBrito. She tries to give parents good, communicative coping tools in handling conversations about cyberbullying. "Instead of waiting until someone has threatened your life online—because that does happen—we have already begun to have conversations with parents, teaching them responses and how to recognize bullies, how to be someone who responds well, how to step in a gracious way."

That advice is echoed by Pott. "Make the home a safe place," he emphasizes, "and limit the amount of time on social media when possible." He adds that when a child or teen's network is strong enough, it can help encourage him or her not to respond in hurt and anger—and perhaps not at all. "There is also a lot to be said for simply being silent. Most times they

... developing a good, strong support system around a child is critical in combatting cyberbullying—and that includes putting parents on notice about the messages *they* might be unintentionally sending their children.

will go away because they are not getting a response from others. This is a lot like Jesus did through the [Passion and Crucifixion]—saying very little and having no need to defend Himself, because He knew who He belonged to.”

That will not work in every case, of course. Cyberbullying can be unrelenting and the bullies can be incredibly persistent. This is an issue that has no easy solution. Nevertheless, parents and counselors do have tools at their disposal that can combat the scourge of cyberbullying, help the kids in their care to soldier through and, perhaps, even grow a little from the experience. ✦



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by Shaw Wendi Fortuchang, M.D., FAPA

In Part 2, Dr. Fortuchang takes a closer look at the effects of addiction on DNA and brain function, the issue of heritability, and the specific impact that different classes of drugs can have on adolescent brain development. The research on evidence-based interventions is discussed, including the appropriate roles and efficacy of medication use and one's faith as a protective factor.

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by Joshua Straub, Ph.D.

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With the increase in technology use among teens and children, particularly smartphones¹ with built-in cameras, the issue of “sexting” has been at the forefront of parental concerns, legislative action, and criminal justice efforts. Sexting is defined by the *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* as, “the sending or forwarding of sexually explicit photographs or videos of the sender...”²

There is generally no differentiation between sexting with a minor and child pornography except to the extent that sexting can be a photo or video of the sender, rather than an unknown person, and with the sender’s knowledge and consent. However, possession of sexually explicit content of a minor known to the recipient is still considered possession of child pornography because all graphic content of any minor is illegal. Federal law³ prohibits enticing or asking a minor to engage in sexting and the law recognizes that minors cannot consent from a developmental perspective.

This discussion raises several obvious questions: What happens when a minor intentionally sexts an adult? What happens when adults believe they are sexting with another adult who is actually a minor? Are these issues legitimate defenses or do they provide an opportunity to abuse and sexually exploit children under the guise of, “I didn’t know?” What about sexting between minor children?

ING

LAWS, ISSUES, AND MINORS

JENNA ELLIS

If parents think, “My child would never do that!,” consider a 2013 study of high school students that found nearly 20% of participants reported they had sent a sexually explicit image of themselves through a cell phone, and more than 25% reported forwarding an image.

The answers are still evolving within state legislatures... and what defenses may be available for intentionally and knowingly sexting with a minor versus, for example, believing falsely that the communication was between two adults? The bottom line is that sexting should always be avoided, not just to avoid potential criminal consequences, but also because pornography is so damaging to both children and adults.

In many states, community awareness programs are available through local district attorneys’ offices⁴ and United States Attorneys’ Offices⁵ to inform parents about safeguards. Parents have a right to monitor a minor child’s electronic communication and should use available parental controls. Also, parents should sit down with their children before they have their first smartphone or opportunity to access the Internet and discuss the rules around smartphone use, while establishing good boundaries that are consistently enforced.

In law enforcement briefings, agencies suggest that applications such as Snapchat™ (that delete content after a user has viewed it for a period of mere seconds) are often the biggest media platform for adults who are intentionally engaging in sexual exploitation of minors. Avoiding these types of apps, online chat rooms, and other functions of smartphones are simple, but very effective, ways to reduce the opportunity of your children engaging in or becoming victims of sexting.

The good news is that both state legislatures and law enforcement agencies have the same goal of protecting children and punishing and disincentivizing adults from enticing, abusing, and exploiting children. However, as always the case with the law, the issues and how to best achieve these goals are much more complex than they may first appear, especially when the chief concern of parents is to rightly and simply protect their children from being victimized or engaging in sexting.

Though sexting is still a relatively recent technological development, the law in all 50 states⁶ is currently very clear that regardless of the medium of receipt, possession of sexually explicit content from minors always constitutes a criminal offense for an adult. In other states, sexting can violate child pornography laws even if the texting is between minors. Other instances have involved teens being charged for possessing sexually explicit photos of themselves, under the theory that children cannot consent to creating or engaging in child pornography, even at their own initiation.

It is especially important for teens to understand they can find themselves charged in the juvenile justice system for engaging in sexting. It is a tough conversation to have, but in the technology age when so many minors have smartphone access, it is imperative that parents educate their kids on the risks—not just to avoid a juvenile record, but also to avoid the serious spiritual and mental health issues that are linked to use of pornography. Sexting is a form of pornography—the user just happens to know the person in the sexually explicit image.

If parents think, “My child would never do that!,” consider a 2013 study⁷ of high school students that found nearly 20% of participants reported they had sent a sexually explicit image of themselves through a cell phone, and more than 25% reported forwarding an image. Additionally, even if a child would not think of sending sexually explicit content, almost 40% of survey participants reported receiving a sexually explicit image. This was five years ago, and smartphone use has only grown since then.



Do your children know how to respond if they receive a sexually explicit image? Will they tell you about it? Consider creating guidelines and an open dialogue with your kids so that if they receive an image or video on their smartphones, a plan is already in place to both mitigate the psychological effects and reduce the likelihood the child will be drawn into sexting. Pornography is a very real and gripping temptation, especially among pubescent boys, and foreclosing it before it becomes an issue can save so much heartache down the road.

Another important consideration for parents is that the law and court system cannot ever truly make whole a child who has been the victim of sexting. Unlike a property crime, where a new vehicle may be traded out for the same vehicle damaged in a car crash, physical, emotional, and mental harms can only be addressed through a biblical response to the sin we inevitably choose to participate in or is foisted upon us through other sinful human beings.

This is where the mental health and counseling piece plays a very important role and parents should be concerned first and foremost with getting their children

(and even themselves) into Christian counseling. The consequences of sin can be devastating, whether we are the perpetrators or victims. If you are concerned your child may be a victim of sexting or is currently involved in pornography, there are many resources available through your local church or finding a Christian counselor.⁸

Importantly, Christians should be addressing sin through biblically-based resources. God does not leave us in our despair or victimization and, even though it may seem like there are so many more opportunities for children to be exploited and exposed to pornography in today's tech age, the reality is that He has promised to give us everything we need to live rightly.

Second Peter 1:3-4 says, "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

We will never be perfect parents or able to protect our children from all harm, but we can ensure that we are making wise decisions, training up our children in biblical truth and righteous values, and making sure we go through the necessary steps with them for repentance or restoration when harm does come their way. "Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). ❌



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ONLINE PORNOGRAPHY AND THE LOSS OF MARITAL INTIMACY

Over the years, we have counseled hundreds of couples for whom the husband has committed infidelity in a variety of ways; and our most common expression of it has been pornography and masturbation. Those two almost always go together. This has been our professional experience. Our personal experience with this topic also includes the history of Mark's sexual addiction, first confronted in 1987. We have been in recovery ourselves for more than 30 years. Following are our thoughts about what has been helpful for us and those we counsel.

Pornography use is a serious problem and often leads to sexual addiction. Components of the latter would include powerlessness and an inability to stop even though you desire to do so. Addiction also creates neurochemical tolerance, as the brain can become tolerant to the neurochemicals of sexual arousal—such as adrenaline and dopamine. Whether it is a problem or an addiction, there are consequences to marital closeness.

The Physical Impact of Pornography and Sex Addiction

We have long known that usage of pornography and masturbation lead to erectile difficulty. This is because the addict has conditioned himself to orgasm to thoughts outside the marriage and the friction of his own hand. He has also trained himself to orgasm quickly, thus making the experience of marital, vaginal sex frustrating and unsatisfying. Psychologists have recently labeled this phenomenon, “pornography induced erectile dysfunction” or PIED.

A core belief of sexual addicts is, “sex is my most important need.” When the energy of this belief is brought into the marriage, the spouse can feel objectified—there is a “taking,” not “sharing,” of her body that does not feel loving. Furthermore, she often does not understand why she feels sad or “used” because she does not know about his pornography use or sexual addiction. Sex can also be used to de-stress the day, feel less lonely, or help one fall asleep. Once again, it is difficult for a partner to feel chosen when sex is used for these purposes.

More sex can become the proposed solution, but the sexual desire of a sexual addict progresses over time. If a spouse submits to these physical drives, it can make the problem worse. It is no different than giving someone who struggles with alcohol more alcohol to satisfy his or her problem!



The Emotional Impact of Pornography and Sex Addiction

Pornography and sex addiction are coping behaviors that are used to avoid or suppress feelings. In clinical terms, it is the way addicts learn to affectively regulate their emotions. In the bigger picture, then, emotions are not talked about and emotional intimacy is compromised. Any coping behavior or substance used to escape feelings (food, alcohol, organizing, work, withdrawal, sex, sports, kids, socializing, technology, etc.) lead to distancing in a relationship. Coping behaviors and substances are self-centered. They are used by someone to survive or medicate feelings he or she does not want to experience. When they are used, growing closer to someone in a relationship is sacrificed.

The Relational Impact of Pornography and Sex Addiction

The use of pornography and/or sexually-addictive behavior

involves secrets, lying, and hiding, which lead to broken trust and feeling unsafe. Most spouses report that the lying about these behaviors was extremely more hurtful than the sexual acts themselves, and it disrupted their entire sense of safety in the relationships. When people feel unsafe, they focus on taking care of themselves and pull away from the person creating the unsafety—thus a relationship will deteriorate and “distance” will be felt. For many of the couples we have counseled, this distance causes a pathological shutdown of romantic and sexual intimacy, something we call sexual anorexia.

Until there is a foundation of truth-telling in the relationship, there will be distance. On our Web site, you will find a document that we have created on how clinicians can help couples share in full disclosure to begin the journey of truth-telling.¹

MARK AND DEBBIE LAASER



The Spiritual Impact of Pornography and Sex Addiction

We believe that healthy sexuality is the expression of emotional and spiritual connection. The first expression of sex in the Bible appears in Genesis 4:1, where it describes that Adam “knew” Eve. What did God have in mind when He was asking us to *know* each other? The Hebrew verb, *yada*, like many Old and New Testament words, is very holistic. David uses this word throughout the Psalms to refer to knowing God. This makes it rather clear that there is both a spiritual and emotional dimension. We also believe that this physical, spiritual, and emotional knowing is what the Old Testament refers to when Jesus and Paul talk about a couple coming together to form a “one flesh union” (Genesis 2:24, Mark 10:8, Ephesians 5:31). Paul compares that union to be like the relationship of Christ to the Church which, of course, is a sacrificial one (Ephesians 5:32).

We believe that any couple should not be sexual if they cannot honestly say they are spiritually and emotionally connected. Also, we do not think couples should be sexual if either of their brains cannot be present in the room. In other words, thoughts are about each other, not worrying about the past or imagining other people or experiences. For some couples, it is possible to change this pattern by having sex in a position where they are face-to-face with their eyes open.

There is no doubt that God created our bodies to enjoy a physical connection through our sexuality. However, if sex is used to “take” from another to calm anxiety, de-stress after a hard day or create closeness when all else is chaotic or disconnected, it does not satisfy the soul. When a couple has created *yada* love first—love that is authentic and vulnerable—then their sexual intimacy becomes an expression of that love—and it feels holy and good. And whatever it is and whenever it happens, it is enough.

We also use a tool for couples called, “the abstinence contract.” It is based on 1 Corinthians 7:5, in which Paul

teaches us that we should not deprive each other, except for a time and by mutual consent, so we can devote ourselves to prayer and fasting. The contract asks couples to take sex out for an agreed-upon time (we recommend 90 days). In the meantime, they devote time to spiritual and emotional connection through prayer, meditation, Bible study, setting aside time to talk, or reading spiritual books together.²

Prevention and/or Intervention of Pornography Use and Sexual Addiction

The following are bullet points of factors we believe lead to marital healing from pornography or sexual addiction.^{3,4} With the limitations of this article, we encourage you to look at our other resources for additional explanation of these points.

- Accept that pornography is not healthy.
- Be willing to name pornography as adultery and get help.
- Be broken and remorseful for the hurt and harm pornography has done.
- Seek counseling for the root causes, the “why”—not just help to stop the behaviors.
- Examine your past so you do not repeat it and change what caused the pain using healthy solutions.
- Stay sober and regularly offer information about sobriety to your spouse.
- Be totally truthful about sexual history—and be a truth-teller about *all* things.
- Involve both spouses in the journey of emotional and spiritual growth.
- Learn to own/apologize for things you do that hurt others.
- Be safe people for each other—verbally, physically, financially, sexually, and spiritually.
- Learn to talk about triggers and difficult things in a safe and connecting way.⁵

- Take care of mental health issues: depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention deficit disorder, etc.
- Create vision together—know where you want to go in life together.
- Find purpose in your pain—how has God used it to make you better people?
- Accept that there is no perfect spouse.

Couples can heal from the pain of pornography or sexual addiction. They can, in fact, thrive and not just survive. We believe that with the right resources and community, growth is possible for individuals and their marriages. God does not waste pain. He uses it to strengthen our character and transform us (James 1:2).⁶ ❖



MARK LAASER, M.DIV., PH.D., AND DEBBIE LAASER, M.A., LMFT, are the founders of *Faithful & True*, a leading Christian counseling center for sexual addiction and relational betrayal, located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As husband and wife, Mark and Debbie know, from more than 30 years of personal experience, the healing journey from the pain of sexual addiction. Together, they have authored/coauthored over a dozen books on this subject and lead intensive workshops for men, their spouses, and couples who are struggling with sexual purity, infidelity, and relational issues.

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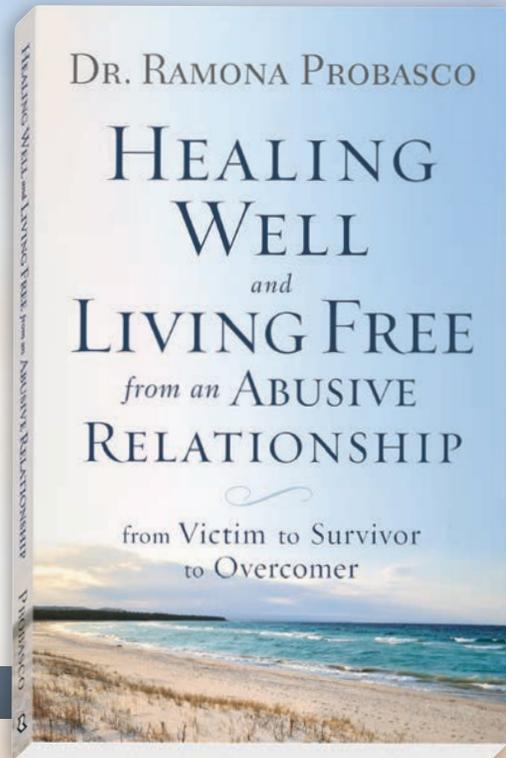
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THE BIG DISCONNECT: TECHNOLOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Our first cry at the moment of birth sends a strong signal, “Notice me, pay attention to me, and comfort me!” Each day that follows, we strive to meet these basic needs of communicating and connecting with others. The digital era offers many platforms to pursue these longings, but does it truly help us relationally?

We all have this intrinsic drive to connect with others, share our needs and dreams, and receive reassurance that we are not alone. God created attachment as the bonding process to meet these needs. Children who receive face-to-face gazing, tender touch, and consistent emotional responding from their parents will develop secure attachment.¹

Securely attached children have an internalized sense of the abiding presence of their parents and primary caregivers, particularly in times of distress or trouble. These children possess a settled confidence that they can launch out to explore the world because their parents have consistently been there for them in times of need. Secure parents take delight in their children, guide them with wisdom, and respond with comfort and love to the pains of childhood.

W. JESSE GILL



The attachment bonding process lays the foundation for verbal and emotional intelligence. It helps to regulate a child’s nervous system, allowing him or her to learn and engage openly with the world. All the benefits of secure attachment carry forward into one’s adult years, undergirding the individual for healthier relationships and optimal functioning levels in life. Yet, we have a huge problem!

The Attachment Bonding Process is Under Assault in the Digital Age

It is now possible to have cell phones, computers, televisions, and portable electronic devices within our gaze during all of our waking hours. The results are staggering for children!

- By the age of seven, many children born in the U.S. or U.K. will have spent one full year of 24-hour days watching screen media.^{2,3}
- The average American child aged eight to 18 spends more than seven hours per day looking at video games, computers, cell phones or television (includes multi-tasking time).⁴

- Television viewing time for children under three is linked to delayed language acquisition.⁵
- For older children and adolescents, excessive screen time is linked to increased psychological difficulties, including hyperactivity, emotional and conduct problems, and difficulties with peers.⁶

For these reasons, the American Academy of Pediatrics discourages any screen viewing for children less than two years of age.⁷ Child experts now challenge parents to limit the number of hours children spend in front of screens. Some screen time can be educational for children older than 24 months. However, *nothing* can take the place of parents spending face-to-face time with their children, laying down the essential pathways for language, emotional regulation, and cognition via the attachment process.

What about adults? How are our family relationships and marriages being impacted by the many screen access points we have at our disposal today? Adults still have daily attachment needs for touch, vulnerable sharing, and being known as whole people within the gaze of trusted others. Too often, social media plays into our God-given desire for connection while simultaneously pulling us away from the forms of true intimacy for which we were created. What could we be doing if we were not on screens during our days and evenings? Are we using screens to distract us or even avoid important conversations that could help us grow?

Attachment bonds are built when we lean on others in times of need. True worth is known when we receive the embrace of others in our moments of brokenness. Is that something we actually do or is even possible on social media? As a marriage therapist, I am keenly aware that many couples now access a digital buffet to avoid dealing with their pain and other life issues. Marital infidelity is on the rise because spouses have online options for cheating, which never existed before. And, all of our instant gratification and adrenaline-inducing screen experiences make it harder to slow down and appreciate our spouses. We may be impatient and even have urges to replace our spousal time with something or someone who is more “exciting.” I believe this grieves the heart of God who instructs us [at least men] to “... be happy with your wife and find your joy with the woman you married...” (Proverbs 5:18, GNT).

There is Hope

We can embrace the power of God’s attachment design to recapture true connection with our loved ones. Whenever I speak on marriage and family issues, I challenge listeners to *turn off* their screens and watch “Face-to-Face TV” instead.⁸ This deliberate play-on words invites us to spend daily time: *Face-to-Face* – Gaze upon the faces of your loved ones at least 20 minutes a day.



UNPLUGGED OR UNDONE?

TECHNOLOGY, MENTAL HEALTH, AND WELLNESS

We now live in the most *technologically connected*, but *relationally disconnected*, culture this country has ever experienced. Technology influences, powers, empowers, and seems to control nearly every aspect of our daily lives. Goodness, what did people do when they had an hour commute home from work and were unable to connect with a family member... unless, of course, they wanted to stop at every other gas station to use a pay phone? Yet, somehow we managed to survive the suspense of not knowing what was for dinner, the latest cute trick our dog had learned, the antics of our next door neighbor or whatever it was that Cathy said to Suzy until we walked in the front door.

Although not an official classification of the *DSM-5*, the term, Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD)—also known as Pathological Internet Use (PIU)—is increasingly seen in literature as an excessive and compulsive use of the Internet that can become habit forming and result in emotional and cognitive dependency. A Pew Research Center study conducted in 1995 showed that only 14% of the U.S. adult population had access to the Internet at the time. Follow-up surveys just five years later revealed that 53% owned a mobile phone and 46% had Internet

access and, in 2015, the numbers were 92% and 87% respectively. Today, the majority of adolescents in the country own a mobile phone and spend, on average, nine hours every day using screen-based technologies (three hours just on their phones). This rapidly changing and complex reality impacts the emotional and psychological well-being of millions, including problematic mental health issues and especially those related to stress, anxiety, and depression.

The end result is that technology far too often dis-

This emotional and relational disconnect counters God’s design for humanity because we were created *through* relationship, *in* relationship, and *for* relationship.

places important social and cognitively stimulating activities (think having a simple conversation over a cup of coffee) and increases a person’s sense of isolation. Is it any wonder that the national “conversation” on so many fronts feels like nothing more than white noise delivered in 280-character sound bites? Cyberbullying in all its forms becomes nothing more than an in-your-face monologue, rather than attempting to solve problems and issues with a face-to-face dialogue. This emotional and relational disconnect counters God’s design for humanity because we were created *through* relationship, *in* relationship, and *for* relationship. And beyond the mental health factors, there are other hazards that are increasing at an alarming rate. According to the National Safety Council, 390,000 injuries occur each year from accidents that involve texting while driving (25% of all traffic-related injuries) and, sadly, also include nine fatalities every day.

I live in a college town, so whenever I am in the local Panera Bread® restaurant, it’s not uncommon to see it full of students. On one occasion, I observed six girls sitting at a couple of tables that were pulled together—three on one side and three on the other. All of them had their laptops open in front of them. My first thought was they were doing homework, checking e-mail, etc.; however, then I saw one typing furiously and hit the enter button... a moment later, two of the girls on the other side of the table looked over, shook their heads, and typed a response. It then dawned on me that the six girls were simply “chatting” with each other via their computers. There they were, literally only two or three feet apart, using technology to communicate!

There is a growing body of research that should capture the close attention of counseling practitioners, educators, and parents. In a recent study conducted by George, et al. (2017), the impact of technology was examined with 151 adolescent subjects who were already assessed as being at risk for mental health problems. Results from the researchers showed that the time spent using digital technologies coupled with the number of text messages being sent to peers were directly correlated with an increase of same-day symptoms associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Conduct Disorder.

A 2012 study by the American Medical Association determined that excessive exposure to artificial light (including low-level light from computers, iPads®, cell phones, TV screens, etc.) can cause mood

disorders because they throw off one’s circadian rhythms. Beside negative repercussions to our physical well-being (e.g., vision and hearing loss, neck strain, etc.), excessive screen time tends to increase distraction, as well as expectations for instant gratification. We already live in a fast-paced, push-button society with an “I want it yesterday” mindset, and technology only fuels this narrative. Over time, our emotional and cognitive reserves become that much more diminished. Lin, et al. (2016) surveyed nearly 1,800 adults (aged 19-32) regarding their social media use and the resulting conclusion showed a strong association with increased depression among participants.

In another study, Rosen, et al. (2013) systematically tested whether the use of certain technologies or media (Facebook®), technology-related anxieties, and technology-related attitudes (multitasking preferences) would predict clinical symptoms for six different personality disorders (schizoid, narcissistic, antisocial, compulsive, paranoid, and histrionic) and three specific mood disorders (major depression, dysthymia, and bipolar-mania). Participants included teenagers, young adults, and adults (N = 1143) who all completed an anonymous, online questionnaire that assessed these variables. The results were intriguing and indicated that having more Facebook® friends predicted a higher incidence of clinical symptoms for bipolar-mania, narcissism, and histrionic personality disorder, but fewer symptoms for dysthymia and schizoid personality disorder. Although technology-related attitudes and anxieties predicted clinical symptoms of these disorders, the results showed both positive and negative aspects of technology, including social media and

ERIC SCALISE

some of the detrimental effects related to multitasking.

As people of faith, we need to learn how to be still and how to be silent... in essence, to unplug. Luke 5:16 tells us that, "... Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." If Christ, being fully human and fully God, felt the need to disconnect on a regular basis, then how much more do we need to do the same? God encourages us with the words of the psalmist, "... Be still, and know that I am God..." (Psalm 46:10), which makes one wonder if we can really know that God is Lord in our lives if we are not still. From time to time, I ask myself the following question... one that offers a closing thought: If God stopped talking to me, how long would it take for me to notice? ❖



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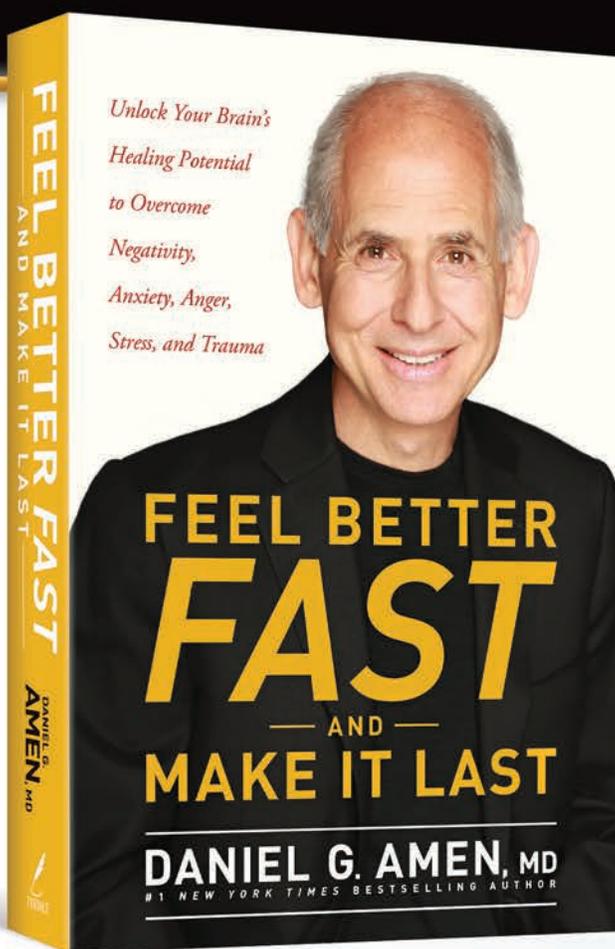
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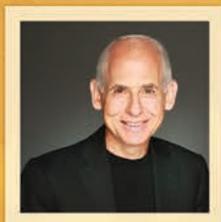
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TECHNOLOGY:

The Impact on Your Career or Business

Will a robot replace you as a counselor or life coach? That's the question thousands of professionals are asking as a result of the tremendous growth of artificial intelligence that is rapidly expanding through mental health and life coaching resources and applications.

Do you think this could never happen? Consider how the trends in technology are beginning to replace professionals, like lawyers and mediators, and have led to artificial intelligence taking away 2% of legal work from humans each year. While that small number may not sound like much, the media project a large number of legal professionals will be replaced by smart machines over the next 10 years.¹ The outlook for professionals in the fields of bookkeeping, court-reporting, paralegals, and accounting are rapidly slipping as well, which makes one wonder, *"Could counseling and life coaching be close behind?"*

Consider the Stanford researchers who launched Woebot,[®] a cellphone app that functions as an online chatbot "therapist" and uses Facebook Messenger[®] to interact with clients wrestling with life issues in order to create positive change. The app has been well-received and incorporates the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for pennies on the dollar anytime an end user is in the mood to talk.² There's no driving to an office, sitting in a waiting room or waiting weeks for an appointment. This is an instant, mental health resource whenever someone wants to talk.

While it is not likely a computer app will take over your job in the immediate future, the trends do show technology rapidly changing all professions, so it is wise to anticipate and make changes now before risking being replaced by a robot. Even better, what if you could reverse the process? What if you could incorporate the smart machines to actually build your business instead of possibly losing it to artificial intelligence? How can you leverage technology to work for you and expand your business?

One way is to start with this core principle: *“You don’t set your value in the marketplace—technology does.”* Sadly, a number of counselors and coaches are completely invisible online and have no professional “footprint”... no Web site... no blog... no social media... nothing. Furthermore, if the Internet sends the message that you are invisible in today’s tech-savvy world, your value to potential clients is practically zero. Try Googling your name or the name of your business. Do you come up as a top 10 listing across dozens of pages or are you nonexistent? If your counseling or life coaching business is not instantly available online, you may already be losing to your competition and will also eventually lose out to artificial intelligence.

Do you find this hard to believe? Consider if you would ever stay at an expensive resort without first checking it out online. Would you really book your next family vacation at a property that did not have a Web site? Not likely. How about one that only had a one-star average rating in its reviews? Nope... not going to happen.

Mental health professionals and life coaches can now be reviewed online, and these reviews can rapidly build or eventually erode a small office or practice. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that 59% of people will take the time to rate their experience with a doctor.³ As online ranking grows in popularity, life coaches and counselors will not be far behind—except for one group... those who are invisible and not accessible online. They will not be ranked because they simply cannot be found.

Take action now to move from the invisible to the visible so people who need your skill set and services can actually find you by using technology. When thinking about what features clients appreciate and seek, Healthgrades.com suggests paying attention to key factors, such as ease of scheduling for an urgent appointment. Also, office comfort/ambience, staff friendliness, average wait time to be seen, and whether the professional spends an *“appropriate amount of time”* with the client are other important considerations. Additionally, education is not a major factor, or even cost, since the personal experience of the client was deemed to be the most important. If clients believe you value them, they will return that value by telling others. An axiom in the people-helping professions is “the best referral source is a satisfied client.”

If a client’s favorite search engine cannot identify and locate you online, your business will eventually fail. You may think it is a huge burden to build a LinkedIn® profile, launch a Facebook® site or create your own blog; yet, it may be an even greater burden to struggle financially. This is because when clients cannot find you, you cannot help them. And if you are essentially “unavailable,” your income will decrease along with your perceived value within the marketplace.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average counselor will generate \$42,840 per year and the average life coach will make \$46,678 per year (Payscale.com). Yet, why settle for the average when you could increase your influence

The outlook for professionals in the fields of bookkeeping, court-reporting, paralegals, and accounting are rapidly slipping as well, which makes one wonder, “Could counseling and life coaching be close behind?”

DWIGHT BAIN

and success and be able to practice generous giving or, where appropriate, donate your professional services? These options are available to those who maintain busy schedules... because for them, technology is working day and night. Be one of those professionals—the kind who will not be replaced by a Woebot.⁴

Are you ready to be intentional and get serious about your work as a counselor or life coach? Stop living in fear of change and embrace the urgent need to begin building a dynamic technological presence that accurately informs others of your expertise and services. LinkedIn® is a great place to start; then follow with Facebook,® a blog, and other social media posts. If you are unsure of how to build your footprint on these sites, there are many teenagers out there who are able to help. When you can proactively show clients how much you value them, they will undoubtedly return the favor, extending you an opportunity to stay busy as a trusted professional who walks with them through the seasons of life. Moreover, you will be someone who reflects the love of God, which is something no computer or technology can ever replicate, and exhibits a shining message of hope to others for a better day. ✘



DWIGHT BAIN, M.A., leads the LifeWorks Group in Winter Park, Florida. He helps leaders manage major change. Dwight has guided thousands of people through challenging times as an author, Nationally Certified Counselor, Certified Leadership Coach, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, and former Family Law Mediator in clinical practice since 1984. Follow him across all social media platforms @DwightBain or just Google his name to see how easy technology makes it to find someone on the Web who isn't afraid to change.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://qz.com/893576/lawyers-are-being-replaced-by-machines-that-read/>.
- 2 <https://www.wired.com/2017/06/facebook-messenger-woebot-chatbot-therapist/>.
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Technology with a Heart



There is a beautiful Scripture in Isaiah 52:7 that reads, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”

Okay, I must admit that as a pastor for all these years, I am old school. Oh, I have all the bells and whistles of modern-day technology—an iPhone®, iPad®, multi-color printer and, on my assistant’s desk, a very large computer that connects everywhere. However, my problem is that I do not know how to work with much success any of the items I just mentioned. In fact, just in writing this article, I needed all manner of assistance with my iPhone® and the new keyboard for my iPad®. Yet, I am determined.

Here is what I am finding—the modern technology that we enjoy, and almost cherish, does not have much of a heart. It can spell big words that I never could, it can format valuable messages in a very organized manner, and it can float little images across the screen like a heart (I mean a real heart), balloons, little kitties and a dog, but it does not have a heart. Now does that mean we no longer need to use the instruments of this modern age? No... but it also does not mean we must throw out the personal touch of yesterday. So now I am going to tell you how I used to communicate with folks along the way... and in many of those ways, still do.

What I Learned from My Grandad

My grandfather was a Sunday school evangelist. He traveled all over North America loving on children and having huge Sunday school rallies. I

It is you who will make the difference. Technology with a heart trumps an e-mail any day.

loved him, and he loved everybody. Many days I would see him at his desk writing notes to folks all over the world. I asked him one day why he spent so much time doing the note writing, and he said, “It’s just a way for those I contact to know how much they mean to me.” That is communication with a heart. I know you could do this with text or e-mail... and it is so much easier and cheaper, but can you really say it the way you want to... or would your handwriting show more love and personal attention? I learned from him that a note carries much more weight than even a telephone call sometimes, so from the beginning of my ministry in a little, out-of-the-way church, I started writing notes and have not stopped since 1963. Every note always ends with a mention of appreciation and suitable affection for the one I am writing. John would write, “My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love...” (I John 3:18).

What I Learned from Experience

Stan Toler, the former general superintendent for the Church of the Nazarene, and I coauthored a book called, *The Minister’s Little Devotional Book*, published by Honor Books. In one chapter, we wrote the following, “Today there is lots of talk about ‘networking.’ It does not matter who you are or how many people you know, God has entrusted to you several of those folks who you can call friend. We should have no regrets about being vulnerable enough to develop lasting friendships. It pays huge dividends.” That is what I believe modern-day communication has done to our society. It has separated

us from one another from having real communication with a heart.

For instance, let me tell you what I developed as a young pastor. I determined that the more men I could lead to Christ, the stronger our church would be. I made a concerted effort to communicate with as many men as I could—to become their best friend, knowing that “the only way to have friends is to be one.” What was my approach? It was to get to know them on a very personal level. And how did I do that? Food!

Men like to eat, so we ate—morning, noon, and mid-day. We talked about their past experiences with the Church. Some were very troublesome. We talked family, sports, hobbies, jobs, successes, and failures. We left very few stones unturned. It worked. Two of my churches became some of the largest in our denomination. I traveled all over the world talking to groups about a ministry to men. How did it work? I became their best friend. After every meeting with a man, I would go back to my office and jot a note to him, attempting to capture the essence of our conversation. At the end of each note, I would say, “If ever you need me, just call.” Most did not need to, but those who did experienced “old-school technology with a heart.”

The essence of all of that is spiritual reproduction you would never get with modern methods. Remember what Paul said to Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2). The personal touch still works; and if done in love, as we are instructed, the results will be blessed. “By this everyone will know

that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). John wrote these words expecting Christian love for others to be authentic and personable.

An Epilogue

I am not knocking modern-day communication methods. I just know you cannot beat the personal touch. Most people lead lonely lives... like ships passing in the sea. What would happen if along the way we would stop and simply say, “How are you doing?” or “Can we have a cup of coffee together?” A simple expression of “old-school technology with a heart.”

So, the old-fashioned way—the phone, notes, visits, time around a cup of coffee or just a quiet way of expressing friendship and concern—will never be replaced by a text, computer or any mechanical device. It is you who will make the difference. Technology with a heart trumps an e-mail any day.

All great men and women became great because they invested time, talent, and ability for the good of others. Be blessed! ❖



REV. H.B. LONDON, JR., D.D. (1936-2018), served nearly 35 years in pastoral ministry—20 as Pastor to Pastors with Focus on the Family. His final years

in ministry were dedicated to pastoring at Friendship Church in Palm Desert, California. On October 16, 2018, the Lord called H.B. home after a long and courageous battle with cancer. His service, love, and devotion to the lives of all those he touched will have a lasting impact. What a joy it must have been when H.B. heard Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

God or Technology: Who is Our Master?



I walked into a restaurant recently and noticed two parents and two children sitting together in a booth. Both adults were on their phones scrolling through e-mails and both children were doing something on iPads®. The children were under 10-years-old. It made me sad. One of the details research showed us a long time ago is that children who experienced regular family dinners had much higher success rates across the board as they grew up. Family dinners were the best predictor—not grades, SAT scores or any number of other things. More recent research has shown that excessive screen time results in childhood obesity, social-relational difficulties, and disturbed sleep patterns. Other studies suggest

that too much screen time is inhibiting children from learning to read facial and other non-verbal cues, as well as recognize emotions.

As counselors, you and I work with broken relationships. We see fractured families, alienated teens, teens and adults addicted to pornography, adults who cannot listen or have empathy, children with attachment disorders, and many other heartbreaking problems. There was a recent article in *The New York Times* titled, “Thermostats, Locks and Lights: Digital Tools of Domestic Abuse.” Internet-connected locks, lights, and cameras are manipulated by abusers who remotely use them to harass, monitor, seek revenge, and control. It is another level of the abuse of power

and terrifying to its victims.

The point, of course, is that anything—human or electronic—can be used for good or evil. Baseball bats have been used to play a game and score runs, but they have also been used to kill. Technology can help you find your way in a new city, connect you to loved ones across the globe, and assist you or your children in learning history or a new language. It can also be used to manipulate, bully, traffic people or rot your soul through constant use of pornography. What is central is not technology, but human beings made in the image of God and given agency so as to shape and influence the world and others. We are to be shaped by God Himself, active in our lives and our characters. We are

then, in turn, to be a shaping influence on others and our world. That influence is to be like salt and light, which means that we, as God's people, effect change on both corruption and darkness. We cannot begin to do that if we bow in obedience to technology regarding our time, relationships, and how we feed our minds and hearts. You cannot consume corruption a few hours a day with pornography and be salt. You cannot yield hours of your time to a screen in an anesthetizing way and be light for others in your life. You cannot pour out love and grace on the lives of others if you live disconnected from their faces and feelings. You cannot engage in significant dialogue with a spouse or a child or a friend without putting down the screens. You cannot use anything as a narcotic and be alert to the people around you.

Everything we use in life—food, drink, work, money, possessions, position or screens—has the capacity to own us... to rule us. We are creatures. We are meant to be owned; we are meant to serve. If you cannot put your phone down, it owns you. You serve as a slave to your phone. It has the power to interrupt your conversations, dinners, work, prayer or anything else. If you cannot spend an evening with loved ones without screens, then screens own you. And since we are image bearers, we eventually bear the image of what we continually sit with or absorb.

We are meant to be face-to-face. We are meant to walk side-by-side. We are meant to hear and listen... speak and understand. We have the amazing capacity for empathy, which means we can be in a feeling with another. Those who have absolutely no empathy we call sociopaths. They are able to do terrible violence to others without feeling. Children who are constantly on screens are learning by default not to have empathy. When you remove the screen for a few days, that

capacity begins to return. Children are malleable. The longer such behavior goes on, the less malleability there is. We have all seen this in the therapy room with someone who has looked at pornography for many years, hours at a time. They cannot "see" another person. They do not know their own impact. They do not grasp intimacy. They cannot be with or feel with.

You and I are meant to know God, see Him, walk with Him, and be shaped by Him. From that place, we are to have dominion over the world—and that includes screens, not just thorns and weeds. We have a God who became like us. He entered into our world, our skin. It is empathy unlike anything we have ever known. He became flesh and was in feeling with us. He felt our joys and sorrows, our grief and evil. He felt our longings for intimacy and love and bore all the ways we bow to everything but Him. May we use the tools that have been created in this world as just that... tools. They are not our masters, so they are not to have dominion over us. And may we, like Him, enter into the lives of others, feeling with, looking in their faces, and listening to their hearts. May we teach the next generation mastery over the things in this world, whatever they may be, and model for them being mastered by our incarnated, empathic God who died that we might be subject only to Him who loves us. ✠



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PH.D., is globally recognized for her 45 years of clinical work with trauma victims, having trained caregivers on six

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**We are meant to
be face-to-face.
We are meant to
walk side-by-side.
We are meant to
hear and listen...
speak and
understand.**

Staying Present in an Age of Distraction



The first line of a book is very important. This is especially true in today's digital age, when an author only has a few nanoseconds to grab your attention.

A few first lines are so good that soon they are dropped into conversations more often than the book titles they follow. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." comes to mind; so does, "They call me Ishmael." My favorite first line is more clever than memorable. C.S. Lewis begins *The Voyage of the Dawn*

Treader with, "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it."

Some authors take you to the very heart of their books with the leading line. Richard J. Foster began his now classic, *Celebration of Discipline*, with the words, "Superficiality is the curse of our age." That particular first line is on my mind for two reasons. The first is that the Martin Institute and Dallas Willard Center at Westmont College recently threw a birthday party for that book—which turned 40-years-old this year. Well, it was more of an

academic conference than a party, but there was a lot of celebrating, including festivities for the 30-year anniversary of Dallas Willard's book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

The second reason that particular first line is on my mind is because Foster stated during his keynote talk that if he were to write that book today, he would choose a different first line. The new book on spiritual disciplines would begin, "Distractibility is the curse of the present age."

Foster's recent observation will not be a surprise to anyone who has looked out over a classroom full of college students. Dian Schaffhouser, a senior contributing editor, shares some recent research on this topic in an article written for *Campus Technology*. She posits that students are now more distracted than ever. In a typical classroom, students are checking their digital devices an average of 11.43 times during class for "non-classroom activities."¹ And she goes on to reference a study published in the *Journal of Media Education*, which found that typical students spend a fifth of their time in class doing digital things that are unrelated to their school work.

I should probably confess that my record here is not clean. I am still trying to repress one embarrassing memory. More than a decade ago, I had discovered that it was possible to check e-mail while giving the appearance of listening to a speaker. In my excitement about this new avenue for multitasking, I decided to also check the Atlanta Braves score that day. I went one bridge too far. Immediately, some pop-up ad loudly announced for the conference speaker and room full of listeners to hear:

“Congratulations, you’ve just won free tickets!”

Being prone to embarrassment, that pretty much ended my surfing during lectures. Being prone to confession, I told one of my daughters about my experience. She was a college student at the time and had a one-word diagnosis of the situation. “Amateur,” she said, and then pointed out the location of the mute button.

However, I have distracted myself from this reflection, so back to the academic conference. Charles Farhadian is a professor of World Religions and Christian Mission at Westmont College. He has written multiple books and his lectures are so interesting that a student’s only temptation in his classes is to be listening to his old YouTube® lectures while he is giving a new one. “Charlie,” as his friends call him, is working on a new book. The working title is, “Analog Living in a Digital World.” During his talk by the same title, he pointed out that, “It’s not having or using devices that seems to be the problem; it’s identifying with them so much that we can’t live without them; it’s giving over power to them that they don’t possess.”²

Then he underscored two, primary temptations that must be overcome as we step into the miracles and distractions of the digital age. First, we need to be aware of the powerful formative effect of our devices and approach them with wisdom. Quoting Augustine, Charlie said, “Created things are to be *used*, but only God is to be *enjoyed*.” The second temptation, Charlie continued, would be to allow virtual communities to become substitute expressions for living in communion with God and others.³

We each have been given God’s first line, the purpose statement if you will, for our lives. We are placed on earth for a little while to learn how to live in love with God and each other. And this, of course, requires

our focused attention. We are to learn to live in such a way that we are constantly thinking about the magnificence of God, and then both willing and acting on what is good for others. It would be a shame for us to be distracted from living out the narrative suggested in the first line of our lives.

What can be done? Since I may not have your attention for much longer, I will be brief.

1. Recognize the power of habits. Farhadian referenced that the average young person will spend 10,000 hours gaming by the age of 21 and points out the irony that this is the same number of hours a recent *Harvard Business Review* noted as the amount of time it takes to become an expert on a topic.⁴ Where we place our time and attention creates automatic responses in the habits of our minds and bodies. And if we pile up enough habits and think enough new thoughts, we may eventually become experts in “our chosen field of study.” Accordingly, it seems right that we should ask ourselves the question: “What are the patterns of thought and behavior in which I wish to become an expert?”

2. Introduce competing habits. Fight fire with fire and habit with habit. That is, we can develop daily habits for increasing our attention to, and interaction with, invisible things such as the Trinity and Kingdom of God. Perhaps a realistic goal here is “balance.” What if we decide to practice a balanced appetite for the new and old, fast and slow?

- a. For every hour spent in the digital world, why not resolve to spend an hour with an old book written by a devotional master?
- b. We can resolve to spend as much time in face-to-face community interactions as we invest each day in Facebook® or other digital community platforms.

- c. We can resolve to spend at least as much time intentionally slowing down and practicing the spiritual practices, such as the disciplines of blissful boredom and crab grass contemplation, as we are already spending in the busy distractions of texting, e-surfing and multitasking.

3. Remember that digital advances are much like feelings.

Each can be a wonderful servant, but is always a terrible master.

Daily we are grooving habits. Through regular examination, we can observe whether these repeated practices are being carved into our lives in ways that increase our awareness of, or distract us from, God’s first line for our lives. ✕



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Director of the Martin Family Institute for Christianity and Culture and the Dallas Willard Center for Christian Spiritual Formation at Westmont College. He founded, with David G. Benner and Larry Crabb, ; directs the Renovaré Institute for Christian Spiritual Formation; and has authored several books. Gary still teaches at Richmond Graduate University when they let him.

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Facilitating Collaboration in Mental Healthcare



"Where no counsel is,
the people fall: but in the
multitude of counsellors
there is safety."
– Proverbs 11:14 (KJV)

Advances in research and technology have improved our access to complex data about mental health and illness. In response to this growing database of knowledge, mental health professionals have become more specialized in the kinds of services they provide. As a result, care is often delivered to clients by providers from multiple disciplines. Someone with a marital problem may receive help from a marriage and family therapist with marital communication, an individual therapist for family of origin issues, a psychiatrist or nurse practitioner for antidepressant therapy, a family physician for stress-induced hypertension or a pastor for spiritual direction. Imagine the confusion if the antidepressant medication caused sexual dysfunction and the other members involved with

the person's treatment were not aware of this complication. Imagine the unproductive tangents that would be available for psychological or spiritual inquiry of a problem that was, in essence, a medication side effect. Imagine if the therapist knew the patient was not taking his or her antidepressant medication consistently, but never told the psychiatrist. Imagine if the blood pressure medication was worsening the depression and the pastor assumed it was the result of unconfessed sin and guilt. If collaboration does not occur in these environments, then a multitude of counselors would not be safe.

There are several factors that may contribute to collaboration challenges between professionals. In some cases, one care provider views his or her contribution as being more important than those by other providers from different

disciplines. The therapist may view the psychiatrist as just a "pill pusher" who is not interested in addressing the "real problems." The psychiatrist may view the pastor as just "simplistically giving out Bible verses to placate" rather than actually having an interest in the "science" of mental illness. The family doctor could be minimized as someone who gives out drugs for blood pressure instead of emphasizing diet, exercise or more natural interventions like supplements. In other words, each member of the treatment team may have biases that lead them to devalue what other providers of services offer. Thus, collaboration would be viewed as a waste of the most common challenge to collaboration—time.

Time demands usually lead most professionals to unrelenting frustration when they play "phone tag" while trying to contact another member of the "treatment team" for the purpose of collaboration. For example, a recent case of mine consisted of responding to e-mail, faxes, phone calls, texts, and "snail mail" about medication side effects, costs, insurance company coverage issues, pharmacy refills, prescription drug monitoring programs, laboratory test results, writing letters, disability forms, requests for speaking/writing, professional reading, and consoling my daughter whose dog was very ill at the vet. By the way, I also see patients. So against this background,

a therapist calls wanting to discuss a patient with me. Good luck! However, these types of demands are shared by multiple disciplines in the people-helping fields. The following are suggestions for effectively facilitating successful collaboration.

- First, obtain the necessary consent from the client(s) and then send a signed release before initiating any contact for collaboration.
- Ask for the provider’s desired method of confidential communication—phone, letter, fax, text or voicemail.
- Do not ask for five minutes and take 15 to express your concern(s).
- Ask for specific times to call or receive a returned call.
- Do not ask for more than five minutes to collaborate.
- Ask specific questions that can result in brief answers.
- Do not call to verbally discuss a referral that may never come in for a visit; instead, do it in writing so your concerns are documented.
- Do not question or criticize a fellow colleague’s judgement. Use phrases like, “Could it be...,” “I wonder if...,” “What do you think about...” or “I have heard...” to present your opinion.
- Send thank-you notes for good results.
- Develop *relationships* with decision makers in the offices with which you often collaborate... and leave your business cards with your areas of expertise noted.
- Recruit the office with food

and coffee... and treat the staff with respect so they will know your name and your calls will get returned.

Collaboration works when a strategic plan is in place and there is a sense of mutual value among providers in the decision making process. However, the process must be intentional and proactive. Beyond the fundamental ethical value to “do no harm” to the client, we must also endeavor to do whatever can be defined as a best practices approach on behalf of those to whom we provide care and counsel. ✦



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Evaluating eCounseling Platforms



Undoubtedly, the Internet has permeated almost all aspects of life today. Using online services, a person can have groceries delivered, schedule maid services, and even earn a college degree. Few are surprised that eCounseling is emerging in popularity. Several eCounseling services are currently in operation and actively advertise to both clients and counselors.¹ At least one company, BetterHelp, offers a division catering to Christians called, “Faithful Counseling.”² These businesses offer counselors and clients secure platforms for online “chat,” telephone communications, message boards, and/or video communications.

eCounseling platforms offer certain benefits to therapists. For example, BetterHelp advertises that therapists can see an increased volume of clients and job flexibility.³ While platforms are HIPAA compliant, counselors should confirm this in order to verify the protection and privacy of medical records, and any corresponding obligations on their part, before contracting with any platform. Counselors are not employees of the platforms, but are classified as independent contractors (1099 providers). Platforms typically disclaim any responsibility for counselors’ actions or inactions. Accordingly, a counselor must verify that his/her malpractice insurance covers all forms

of eCounseling in which he/she is engaging.

The 2014 AACC Code of Ethics recognizes certain benefits to the client through eCounseling and eCare, stating, “Christian counselors are aware that potential benefits [of eCounseling] include... alleviating geographic isolation... services to those with physical disability and/or illness; counseling for those who might not seek traditional counseling; and counseling for clients who have greater comfort with written expression.”⁴ Nonetheless, these benefits come with certain risks, also acknowledged by the AACC, including, “... concerns with confidentiality; challenges to developing and maintaining

the therapeutic alliance; the lack of nonverbal communication information; clarifying and resolving practice and licensure jurisdiction issues; provision of emergency services; the relative lack of efficacy studies; and the lack of ethical guidance.”⁵

Therefore, Christian counselors should carefully consider both the risks and benefits to clients. Three important questions should be asked by any Christian counselor before engaging with eCounseling platforms:

1. Is eCounseling in the best interest of my client(s)? Christian counselors following the 2014 AACC Code of Ethics must do more than avoid *malfeasance* toward clients. The AACC approaches ethics from a position of *beneficence*, as required under biblical mandates.⁶ Therefore, a Christian counselor must approach eCounseling on the basis of the best interest of the client. Some clients may require face-to-face communications unavailable through eCounseling. For example, counselors may benefit from observing certain physical and nonverbal indicators when assisting clients with substance abuse issues (e.g., skin punctures, blood-shot eyes, facial expressions, body language, etc.). For clients struggling with cutting or suicidal ideation, certain physical indicators may not show when using the platform. These might be informative or critical in evaluating a duty to warn/report. Some clients may simply be more prone to communicate with nonverbal cues.

While a counselor can control who views or hears a conversation on his/her end, the therapist cannot control who may overhear or view conversations on the client’s side. This is particularly concerning if the client is in a relationship with a controlling or abusive partner... or subject to stalking or forced to provide passwords to online communications.

Counselors must also ensure that they are abiding by laws applicable

to the states in which both the client and counselor reside, as well as confirm competency issues are met before engaging with clients in other locations. Has the counselor met all reciprocity requirements in the client’s jurisdiction? Did the eCounseling platform properly screen and match the client with the counselor based on his/her expertise? How should the counselor handle any duty to warn situations, child/elder abuse reporting, emergencies and/or involuntary residential commitment situations? A counselor must consider these questions in determining whether he/she can properly provide eCare for a client, from a position of beneficence, while meeting all legal, ethical, and regulatory requirements/obligations. Not doing so can result in licensing sanctions, malpractice accusations and, worst of all, harm to the client.

2. Do the platform’s requirements conflict with my Christian values? When evaluating an eCounseling platform, Christian counselors must pay particular attention to any Ethics Code(s) or other requirements for which they may be asked to abide, or which might be provided to clients. Not only should the counselor’s own contract be carefully reviewed, but the counselor should also review all consent forms provided to the client. If any of these documents potentially conflict with the counselor’s Christian values, then he/she should seek an exception from the e-platform and/or provide client(s) with any supplemental consent forms or information.

Christian counselors cannot depend on secular ethical codes to protect their religious values. For example, TalkSpace’s “Guiding Principles and Code of Ethics” recognizes “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” as one of several “individual and role differences” that its counselors are required to “be aware of” and “respect.”⁷ Similar provisions in secular Codes of Ethics, including the

While a counselor can control who views or hears a conversation on his/her end, the therapist cannot control who may overhear or view conversations on the client’s side. This is particularly concerning if the client is in a relationship with a controlling or abusive partner. . . .



ACA's Ethical Code, have been used to unfairly reprimand Christian counseling students who either requested a value-based referral for a client seeking counseling to improve a same-sex relationship (e.g., *Ward v. Polite* (2012)),⁸ or shared personal views in class regarding homosexual behavior (e.g., *Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley* (2011)).⁹

Conceivably, a Christian counselor could find him/herself in a similar situation under a licensing board, Human Rights Commission or court, where the counselor has certified compliance to a Code of Ethics as conflicting with his/her Christian values. To lessen the risk of adverse action, the Christian counselor should ensure that the platform either allows for a value-based referral or recognizes a Code of Ethics that does not conflict with his/her Christian worldview.

3. Will using an eCounseling platform subject me to greater risk of malpractice accusations? When evaluating counselor malpractice claims, a court will consider whether the counselor owed a duty to the client, whether that duty was breached, the degree to which the breach led to any harm, and what damages the client received from the harm. Such

lawsuits typically favor the therapist, where the counselor can justify his/her determination.¹⁰ Conceivably, a court may find it harder to accept a counselor's determination where the client was not physically present for the therapist's observation. Liability may also occur if the counselor has not adequately explained the risks and restrictions of eCounseling. This area remains untested.

In appropriate situations, counselors and their clients may greatly benefit from the conveniences of eCounseling platforms. However, Christian counselors must be "as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16) when evaluating whether such a platform protects their interests and, most importantly, provides the best care for their clients. ✦

The information contained in this column is provided for education purposes only. Nothing in this column should be construed as legal advice, and readers should seek advice from a qualified attorney within their jurisdiction for concerns/questions on specific matters. Law varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. I wish to thank Bonnie McJunkin, LPC, for her valuable advice and edits to this column.



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Endnotes

- 1 For a comparison, see <http://www.e-counseling.com/online-therapy/> (accessed 5 June 2018).
- 2 <https://www.faithfulcounseling.com/> (accessed 5 June 2018).

- 3 See https://www.betterhelp.com/counselor_application (accessed 7 June 2018).
- 4 *AACC Code of Ethics, ES2-110-c: Potential benefits of e-counseling and e-care.* American Association of Christian Counselors. 2014. Available at: <https://www.aacc.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AACC-Code-of-Ethics-Master-Document.pdf> (Accessed 5 June 2018).
- 5 *AACC Code of Ethics, ES2-110-d: Potential limitations of e-counseling and e-care.* American Association of Christian Counselors. 2014. Available at: <https://www.aacc.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AACC-Code-of-Ethics-Master-Document.pdf> (Accessed 5 June 2018).
- 6 *AACC Code of Ethics, ES1-000, 1-020: An orientation of beneficence.* American Association of Christian Counselors. 2014. Available at: <https://www.aacc.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AACC-Code-of-Ethics-Master-Document.pdf> (Accessed 5 June 2018).
- 7 Guiding Principles and Code of Ethics. TalkSpace. Available at: https://www.talkspace.com/online-therapy/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Talkspace_CodeofEthics.pdf (accessed 5 June 2018).
- 8 *Client Story: Julea Ward.* Alliance Defending Freedom. 2012. Available at: <https://www.adflegal.org/detailspages/case-details/ward-v.-polite> (accessed: 5 June 2018).
- 9 *Client Story: Jennifer Keeton.* Alliance Defending Freedom. 2011. Available at: <https://www.adflegal.org/detailspages/case-details/ward-v.-polite> (accessed: 5 June 2018).
- 10 Baerger, D.R. (2001). "Risk Management with the Suicidal Patient: Lessons from Case Law." *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 32:359-66.



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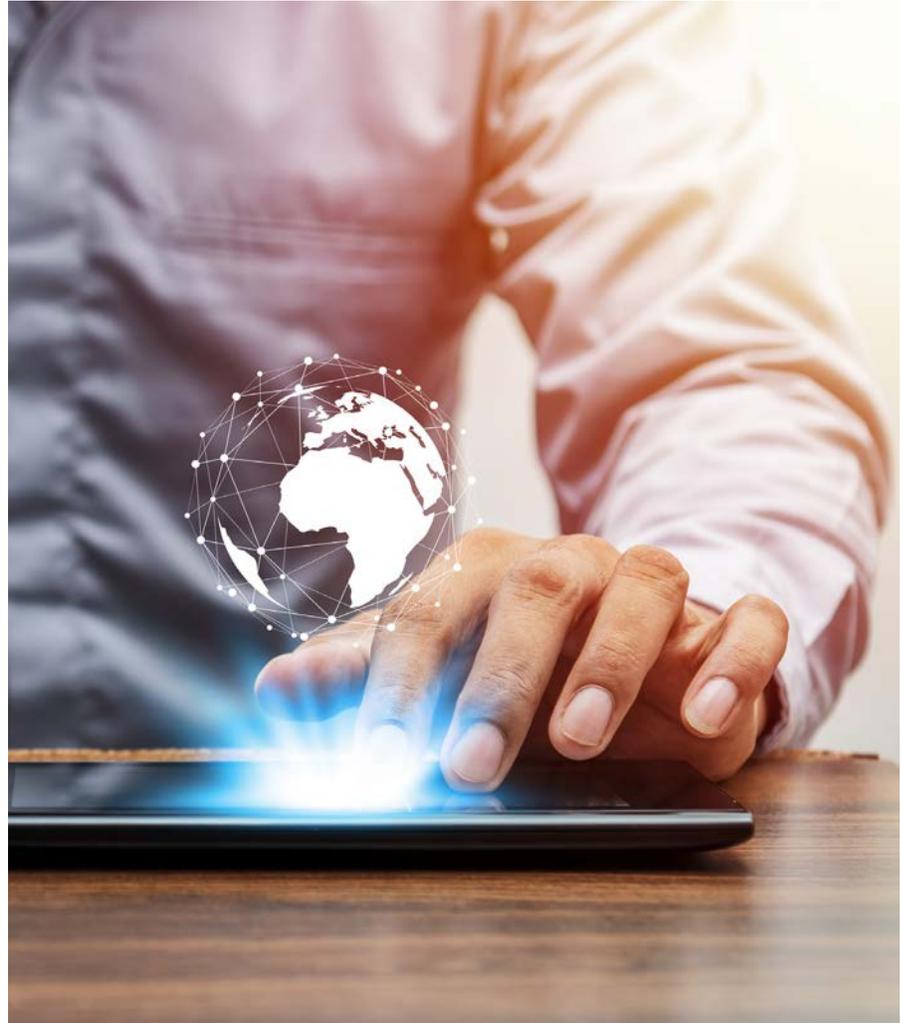
The Technological Revolution and its Implications for Leadership

Reminiscent of Charles Dickens' famed opening line from his classic, *A Tale of Two Cities*, recent technological advances have inadvertently ushered in what could be considered the "best of times as well as the worst of times." With sociocultural repercussions perhaps more momentous than those exerted by the Industrial Revolution, technological innovations over the last generation have created unprecedented historic cataclysmic shifts in the way we live, work, play, worship, relate, and think.

As leaders in the home, church, office, workplace, and community, technology has exerted an enormous impact on us personally and professionally. Virtually everything has changed (which has even helped invent a new pun!), creating wonderful conveniences, as well as tremendous challenges. Technological innovations per se, are value-free—they are intrinsically neither good nor evil. Yet, ironically, the same technology that can help spread the Gospel to exponentially larger populations can, at the same time, make it much easier for evil to flourish.

Today, the Internet and related technologies enable and facilitate the spread of good news to the uttermost parts of the earth more easily, rapidly, and inexpensively than ever before. Users can learn about God and be biblically equipped by a simple click. Access to untold numbers of sermons, Bible studies, discipleship tools and programs, and Christian materials of all kinds is available universally.

Alternatively, the same technological innovations are often used for evil. For example, anyone can now



have unfettered access to pornography in the privacy of one's home and on any personal device or computer without risking public shame and reputation loss. Formerly, such pernicious and nefarious activities had to be conducted by going downtown to an adult bookstore, movie theater, or strip club. Nearly 30% of all data transferred across the Internet is for pornography, and porn sites attract an enormous number of hits. In 2017 alone, the pornographic Web site, Pornhub, got 28.5 BILLION visits

[fightthenewdrug.org]. That's almost 1,000 visits *per second*, 78.1 million per day. Due to technological innovations, this unprecedented, epidemic proliferation of depravity has escalated in ways no one could have foreseen. Other illegal, immoral, and iniquitous activities are, likewise, made easier with technology.

Simply put, technology can be used for good or evil. Certainly technology can help us do far more than specifically promote and proliferate benevolence and malevolence. In fact,

Remember, prevention is always better than, and preferable to, cure! It is much easier to curb or minimize issues before they become full-blown.

the possibilities and potentials for utilizing technology are almost limitless. So what are leaders to do?

To ignore the advents and advances—of all kinds—posed by technology would seem decidedly unwise and ill-informed. To rail against the vices of technology is as foolish as blindly embracing the ongoing, newest techie inventions *carte blanche*. As with most things, it seems reasonable to try to strike a healthy and judicious balance as we attempt to apply relevant scriptural principles to this progressively pervasive phenomenon.

For starters, we need to reconsider the concepts of moderation and balance (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:18; 1 Corinthians 6:12). There is no shortage of available statistics to suggest that Americans spend multiple hours per day on electronics (with some estimates stating that teenagers average as many as nine hours per day on screens; including video games, social media, and television—sometimes accessing multiple personal devices simultaneously).

Obviously, obsessive—if not addictive—an extreme behavior of any type is unbalanced and likely dysfunctional. Spending inordinate time on screens directly limits one's availability to develop other areas of life, including spiritual, social, physical, and personal potentials. It seems as though there is almost a direct correlation between *the more one connects electronically and the more one disconnects emotionally*.

Second, it is prudent for leaders to emphasize the need for accountability

and personal responsibility regarding the realities of human temptations (cf. Proverbs 28:26; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; James 5:16). Remember, prevention is always better than, and preferable to, cure! It is much easier to curb or minimize issues before they become full-blown. An old farming analogy comes to mind here—it is more effective to lock the barn door before the horse gets out. We all have blind spots and need each other to help illumine our areas of darkened self-awareness and limited understanding.

Finally, it is also essential that leaders utilize technology, and particularly social media, with utmost discretion and wisdom (cf. Proverbs 2:12; 3:21; 8:12; 14:8). Most have witnessed the drastic, if not tragic, results of people using social media with little or no prudence, decorum, or plain old-fashioned common sense. Just one impulsive, reactionary, and/or unthinking post can negatively impact lives, relationships, and careers. Both drama and trauma can virally spiral out of control exponentially due to unwise use of technology.

At the same time, leaders need to “get with the times” and incorporate the pragmatic potentials and promises of technology. Electronic forms of communicating, conducting business, performing ministry, and other creative adaptations and applications of technology can save zillions of trees, eons of time, and gobs of expense. Efficiency and effectiveness of leadership can rise with being able to work “smarter” via technological

innovations of all kinds. The world is shrinking daily.

Technology is here to stay. New inventions and innovations are being created every day. We also have to create ethical standards, guidelines, and practices to judiciously and wisely govern the utilization and application of technology if we are to have it work for us instead of against us. To be sure, we have the capabilities to create Orwellian-like monsters. Many times I have been in a store where a computer program will not permit a common-sense solution to a simple, but realistic, problem; thus the human becomes “servant” to the “master’s” invention. The technological tail ends up wagging the creator dog.

The pragmatic question seems to become: How will we anticipate, understand, and implement appropriate ethical and legal parameters to regulate ourselves in a practical and Christ-like manner? Oh well, maybe someone will create an app for that... I just hope my phone has enough space left to download it! ✦



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Technology, Counseling, and Mental Health



A Longitudinal Examination of Pornography Use and Divorce

Perry, S.L., & Schleifer, C. (2018). Till porn do us part? A longitudinal examination of pornography use and divorce. *Journal of Sex Research*, 55(3), 284-296.

How does one spouse who starts consuming pornography affect a marriage? Perry and Schleifer conducted a longitudinal study that examined how beginning to view pornography impacted marital stability over time. The study utilized the first nationally representative sample for an investigation of this type (the General Social Survey, GSS, <http://gss.norc.org/>), applying three, three-wave panels from the GSS (first: 2006, 2008, 2010; second: 2008, 2010, 2012; third: 2010, 2012, 2014).

The researchers applied an entropy balanced logistic regression analysis strategy (a data preprocessing method) to the participants ($N = 2120$).

The investigators found that the risk of divorce approximately doubles for those who began pornography use between waves (time periods). Gender differences in this finding were minimal. After considering several potential moderators, Perry and Schleifer noted that the positive correlation between beginning pornography consumption and divorce was stronger for several groups—for younger couples (aged 20-39), for those reporting higher beginning marital happiness, and for those who were “not especially religious” (p. 293). Discontinuing pornography use between waves

lowered the risk of divorce only for women.

The authors noted several limitations. For example, the GSS survey items were very limited descriptively in regard to types of pornography and degree of usage. Also, the possibility existed that people who divorced between GSS waves began viewing pornography as a consequence of the divorce, although the researchers tried to reduce this possibility by balancing groups and controlling for marital happiness. The survey is important for Christian mental health professionals, as it provides initial insight into how beginning to use pornography may have differential risks for marital stability based on the user’s characteristics (age, religiosity, etc.).

Parental Control of the Time Preadolescents Spend on Social Media

Fardouly, J., Magson, N.R., Johnco, C.J., Oar, E.L., & Rapee, R.M. (2018). Parental control of the time preadolescents spend on social media: Links with preadolescents' social media appearance comparisons and mental health. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. Advance online publication.

While many researchers have studied social media's influence on teenagers, fewer studies have examined its impact on pre-teens aged 10-12. More than 50% of preadolescents use social media, so Fardouly and colleagues wanted to investigate the potential link between the amount of parental control over the time their pre-teen children spend on social media and several areas. These included the amount of appearance comparisons preadolescents make while on social media, their level of appearance satisfaction, depressive symptoms, life satisfaction, and overall time spent browsing social media.

Fardouly and colleagues recruited 528 pre-teens and one of their parents for their sample in Sidney, Australia through distributing flyers in schools, sports clubs, and medical centers. Parents and their pre-teens completed separate online questionnaires. Of the 528 child-parent dyads, 284 dyads endorsed the children using social media (151 girls and 133 boys, 80% white, 12% other, 6% Asian, and 2.5% Middle Eastern). This became the sample for the researchers.

The investigators controlled for a variety of parental factors known to influence pre-teen health in their analysis—parental emotional warmth, parental rejection, parental distress, and parental appearance satisfaction—as well as the influence of gender. They found that more parental control over preadolescent social media time was linked to fewer appearance comparisons with others

on social media which, in turn, was linked to better pre-teen overall mental health. The mediational path also went the other way, meaning pre-teens with fewer depression-related symptoms and higher life satisfaction did not make as many appearance comparisons and browsed social media less, which was associated with parents feeling a higher level of control over their children's social media usage. Longitudinal studies are needed to tease out which path of this bi-directional relationship is stronger.

The authors noted that, "Results of this study suggest that it may be beneficial for parents to control the amount of time their children spend on social media. This finding, however, may be specific to the preadolescent period, when parents still have more influence over their children's behaviours [sic] than in later years" (p. 1464). While limitations to the survey study clearly exist, for Christian therapists working with parents, the results support educating them on the value of social media monitoring and usage limitations for their children starting at a young age.

Neuromodulation Can Reduce Aggressive Behavior Elicited by Violent Video Games

Riva, P., Gabbiadini, A., Lauro, L.J.R., Andrighetto, L., Volpato, C., & Bushman, B.J. (2017). Neuromodulation can reduce aggressive behavior elicited by violent video games. *Cognitive, Affective and Behavioral Neuroscience*, 17(2), 452-459.

Many studies have explored the relationship between violent video games and aggression. Much less research has considered how to reduce aggression levels after someone has participated in violent video games. Riva and colleagues sought to reduce unprovoked aggression in participants who had played violent video games through influencing a brain region believed to be active in the regulation of aggressive

impulses, the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex (rVLPFC). They proposed to do this through anodal transcranial direct current stimulation (tDCS – a non-invasive, painless brain stimulation treatment that uses direct electrical currents to stimulate specific parts of the brain).

tDCS is a brain stimulation technique that is safe and relatively new according to the researchers. It "uses weak electrical currents to induce changes in the cortical excitability of selected brain regions" (p. 453). tDCS shifts resting neuronal membrane potentials. Two, saline-soaked sponge electrodes are applied to the appropriate areas of the scalp to stimulate the specific brain region. In this particular case, the investigators used anodal stimulation to increase the spontaneous firing rate of neurons in the rVLPFC region (the ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for controlling motor inhibition or physical movement).

To test whether tDCS might reduce unprovoked aggression following participating in violent video games, Riva and colleagues randomized 79 participants into a nonviolent or violent video game condition while simultaneously receiving either anodal tDCS or a sham condition for 20 minutes. After the treatment or sham, participants competed to press a button faster than the other based on a contest, with the winner being able to "punish" the loser with a loud noise through headphones. The intensity and duration of the noise would be set by each "contestant" before the trial. The winner and loser, of course, were carefully staged to comply with Taylor Aggression Paradigm principles. The first trial represented the unprovoked aggression condition because the participant set the intensity and duration levels of the noise to use in case of winning without knowing yet what the opponent had set. After losing, the participant experienced that

For the Christian mental health professional, tDCS and this study's results serve as a reminder that neurophysiological strategies represent a potential emerging treatment...

the “opponent” had set the maximum intensity and duration levels for the noise, which represented a provoked aggression condition that was then explored through eight more trials with varying times of winning and losing, as well as varying intensities and durations of noise.

Participants in the sham condition displayed higher levels of unprovoked aggression (their initial settings of noise duration and intensity in trial one) when they had played violent videogames compared to nonviolent. However, participants in the treatment condition (tDCS) showed no difference in levels of unprovoked aggression between those who had played violent videogames and those who played the

nonviolent ones. Pairwise comparisons of unprovoked aggression between the sham condition-violent videogame and tDCS-violent videogame conditions showed the tDCS condition was significantly lower in unprovoked aggression [$F(1, 72) = 25.69, p = .005, d = 0.82$]. Overall, the researchers concluded that “modulating activity in a brain area implicated in self-control and emotion regulation (i.e., the rVLPFC) can break the causal link between exposure to violent videogames and aggression” (p. 456). This preliminary, but interesting, finding needs further research. For the Christian mental health professional, tDCS and this study's results serve as a reminder that neurophysiological strategies represent a potential emerging

treatment for the significant challenges that today's technologies, social media, and gaming industries are creating. ✦



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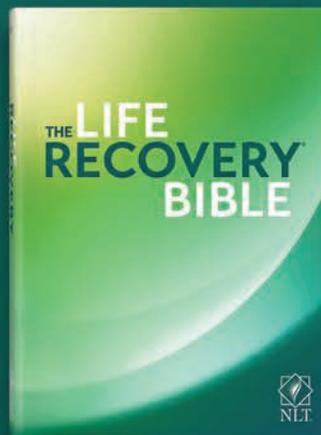
My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.
John 15: 12

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Answer the following questions from this issue of *Christian Counseling Today* by marking the appropriate circle. Once completed, you may send in this entire page or a photocopy with your payment to the address below. Please do not send cash. The quiz is open-book and you will need a minimum score of 70% to receive a letter of completion.

Cyberbullying: An Old Enemy Gets a New, Terrifying Face – Paul Asay

- Ken Pott, a Colorado counselor notes
 - a. a direct correlation between cyberbullying and suicidal ideation
 - b. girls tend to use cyberbullying more efficiently
 - c. boys are less emotionally regulated and more reactive to bullying
 - d. all of the above

Is Technology Stealing Your Brain? – Daniel G. Amen

- The "Google Effect" is
 - a. shopping out of pleasure instead of need
 - b. the loss of the ability to recall information
 - c. the phenomenal increase of knowledge and information
 - d. a condition leading to Alzheimer's disease

Evaluating eCounseling Platforms – Jeanneane Maxon

- Which of the following is *not* mentioned as a possible eCounseling problem?
 - a. the inability to see the client's nonverbal indicators
 - b. others on the client's end overhearing the counseling session
 - c. losing Internet connection at a crucial point in the session
 - d. knowing and meeting a different state's legal requirements

Online Pornography and the Loss of Marital Intimacy – Mark and Debbie Laaser

- Pornography and sex addiction are
 - a. coping behaviors used to avoid or suppress feelings
 - b. struggles to find meaning and one's identity
 - c. behaviors that intensify marital sex
 - d. all of the above

Staying Present in an Age of Distraction – Gary W. Moon

- The *second* temptation of Charles Farhadian is
 - a. identifying with your digital device
 - b. giving your device power it doesn't possess
 - c. substituting virtual communities for God and others
 - d. enjoying created things more than God

Secondhand Screen Time and its Influence... – Joshua Straub

- A recent study found that distracted parental attention
 - a. may create genetic mutations in babies
 - b. may damage babies' cognitive development and ability to process pleasure
 - c. may damage babies' physical growth and development
 - d. all of the above

Technology: The Impact on Your Career or Business – Dwight Bain

- Which of the following is *not* a feature clients appreciate and seek?
 - a. ease of scheduling for an urgent appointment
 - b. education of counselor and cost
 - c. good personal experience and feeling valued
 - d. online visibility, ranking, and staff friendliness

The Big Disconnect: Technology and Relationships – W. Jesse Gill

- Children who receive _____ will develop secure attachment.
 - a. face-to-face gazing, tender touch, and consistent emotional responding
 - b. clear boundaries, consistent discipline, and reassurance
 - c. loving discipline, face-to-face gazing, and consistent emotional responding
 - d. parental attention, loving discipline, and consistent touch

Unplugged or Undone? Technology, Mental Health, and Wellness – Eric Scalise

- Results of recent research show a correlation between
 - a. digital technology/texting and ADHD/Conduct Disorder
 - b. artificial light from computers and mood disorders
 - c. Facebook® friends and certain personality disorders
 - d. all of the above

Violent Video End Games – Gregory L. Jantz

- "Flow" in video games refers to
 - a. keeping the game going for four or more hours
 - b. the speed necessary for video streaming the game
 - c. a condition of absolute presence and happiness...
 - d. the amount of adrenaline released during a violent video game

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Participants will:

- Increase awareness and content expertise on current trends in mental health practice.
- Be able to articulate a more comprehensive understanding of this issue's core theme.
- Be able to integrate spirituality and faith-based constructs into the delivery of care.

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Please rate the following on a scale of 1–5 (1 meaning **Poor** and 5 meaning **Excellent**):

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- _____ The articles in this issue are comprehensive and well written.
- _____ I would recommend this home-study program to other professionals.

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The Road to Nowhere: All the Day

Tucked deep in the thick bush tundra of the Alaskan Iliamna River area and surrounded with soaring snowcapped mountains is a narrow dirt road the locals call the “Road to Nowhere.” The terrain is surreal with a one-way road that looks like it came straight from an epic episode of Alaska’s “Ice Road Truckers.” One slight miscue could result in a precipitous drop over the edge and a person would never be seen or heard from again. I hate heights, so the road had my utmost attention!

When I first heard about the “Road to Nowhere,” I laughed, “You’re kidding, right?!” Nope. It was the only way to get out of the bush to the ocean for a day trip to see if we could land some halibut. At dinner the night before, we were told we had to leave by 4:30 a.m. so we would not miss the high tide and have enough time to fish for the day.

When we left Anchorage for the lodge, there were four of us packed into a small, twin-engine plane with a young pilot. I learned we were heading about 250 miles southwest into the middle of salmon country. There was no way to get there except by plane or boat. Few, if any, people. No stores. No medical facility. No McDonalds. Nothing. Nevertheless, what my son, Zach, and I noticed quickly was that we were not alone. The brown bears and moose owned the land. The salmon were just starting to run the river and the Arctic char were exploding out of the water. It was a place teeming with life and beautiful, glacier-fed crystal streams. We fished together, laughed a lot, and it did not take us long to get “lost” in the bush. The majestic mountains towered all around us. Our time was rich with

fireside chats, games of horseshoes and cornhole and, of course, fish stories. Before long, meal time at the lodge was coveted. Everyone ate together. We were creating moments... memories... new friendships.

The lodge Internet service was spotty at best and refreshingly frustrating. So after the second day, no one in the camp really tried anymore. The call of the wild took over, drowning out the desire to check social media or e-mail. For the first time in a long while, we were free from our personal devices... and by disconnecting, we enjoyed truly connecting.

Technology and Mental Health

As is its yearly custom, Apple® recently unveiled a slew of updates, upgrades, and new features for their product aficionados. Yet, among the many advancements, there was an uncommon addition this year—a tool to help users curb their phone addiction.¹ Even Tim Cook (CEO of Apple) acknowledges it: “Device addiction is a consuming problem that has deep mental health implications.”

By the way, I am not suggesting devices are bad. In fact, some of you are probably reading this on your phones! The problem arises when we allow technology to build a barrier between ourselves and the world around us. For example, half of all teenagers “feel addicted” to their phones and mobile devices. What’s more, 78% of teenagers feel the need to check their mobile devices for notifications and messages on an hourly basis. Parents are almost as bad, with 69% of those polled saying they check their phones at least once per hour.²

What fuels this addictive reaction?

I think a major driver is what is commonly referred to as FOMO—the “fear of missing out.” We cannot seem to shake the nagging sense that everyone else is participating in an amazing experience and we are the only ones who are not a part of it. The only way to ensure we are not missing out is to feverishly check our social media feeds... a habit that quickly becomes an obsession. This dependency has dangerous consequences. Previous studies have shown that nearly half of all adults (47%) admit to texting or reading text messages while behind the wheel of a car, and 44% of adults report having been a passenger when the driver used his or her phone in a way that put people in danger.³

More hazardous still is what happens within our bodies and minds. A recent study suggests a correlation between increased phone use and a rise in depression and suicide in teenagers. Teens who spent five or more hours per day on devices were nearly twice as likely to consider suicide than teens who only spent one hour.⁴

Our kids—no, all of us—are being crushed by a “keeping up with the Joneses” mentality in a social media culture that expects one’s manicured crop of photos and posts to reveal unique and exclusive events and experiences. As our sons and daughters fret over having a polished social media façade, they are starving for meaningful relationships. Snapchat® and Twitter® will *never* be a substitute for face-to-face relationship. My good friend, Dr. Sylvia Frejd, founder of the Center for Digital Wellness at Liberty University, told me, “My concern for the future of this generation is that it will be almost



I challenge you... unplug and take a deep breath. Put down your devices. Watch the sunset. Gaze up at the stars. Press into God's Word and marvel in the wonder of His goodness, grace, mercy, and steadfast love toward you. My phone just started playing George Strait's country music song, "I Saw God Today..." ❄️



TIM CLINTON, ED.D., LPC, LMFT, is President of AACC, Executive Director of the James Dobson Family Institute, and cofounder of Light Counseling, Inc., a clinical practice serving children, adolescents, and adults. He served as a professor of counseling for more than 30 years and is the author/editor of nearly 30 books, including *God Attachment*, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Christian Counseling*, *Break Through*, and *The Struggle is Real*.

impossible for students to get off their devices, because their devices, for many, will be their lives.”

I think it is safe to say we probably all have a love-hate relationship with technology. That is increasingly true in our personal and professional lives. This dynamic is constantly changing and can sometimes masquerade itself in ways that appear good and positive when, in reality, it is actually harmful and damaging. Sometimes we need to get away from it all to clearly see the impact it has on us. The important thing to remember is this... be smart in your use of technology. Be honest about the benefits and downsides. There are plenty of both. Put devices in their proper place so you own technology—it does not own you.

All the Day

When you are in the middle of the Alaskan wilderness, the insanity of technology fades and you learn to adjust... to the weather, the river conditions, the ocean tide, the times the fish are active, and more. It was inspiring to center on, and enjoy, the

compelling majesty, presence, and peace of God and be away from the distractions and noises of everyday life. The canvas paints of the hand of God, and it reminded me how much technology and modern-day conveniences have diverted us from what truly matters.

One morning, our daily devotional, led by the Iliamna River Lodge Camp Proprietor, Bill Betts, was anchored in Acts 18:9-11. In verse 10a, the Lord tells Paul, “I am with you.” This phrase could be better translated, “I am with you all the day.” In this present age, we have invited our phones to be with us all the day. We have the illusion of connectedness. In reality, only the Lord can be consistently, reliably, and powerfully present with us.

The “Road to Nowhere” revealed the majesty and greatness of God. Truly “the heavens declare the glory of God...” (Psalm 19:1). Even Paul wrote about the wonder of God’s creation in Romans (1:20) that speaks of His existence. God, help us not have to go to “nowhere” to hear Your voice.

Endnotes

- 1 Kelly, H. (2018). iOS 12 highlights: Memoji, tech addiction tool, group FaceTime. Retrieved from <https://money.cnn.com/2018/06/04/technology/apple-wwdc-announcements/index.html>.
- 2 Common Sense Media (2018). New report finds teens feel addicted to their phones, causing tension at home. Retrieved from <https://www.common SenseMedia.org/about-us/news/press-releases/new-report-finds-teens-feel-addicted-to-their-phones-causing-tension-at>.
- 3 Madden, M., and Rainie, L. (2010). Major findings. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2010/06/18/major-findings/>.
- 4 Walton, A.G. (2017). Phone addiction is real – and so are its mental health risks. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalt/2017/12/11/phone-addiction-is-real-and-so-are-its-mental-health-risks/#3a75669613df>.

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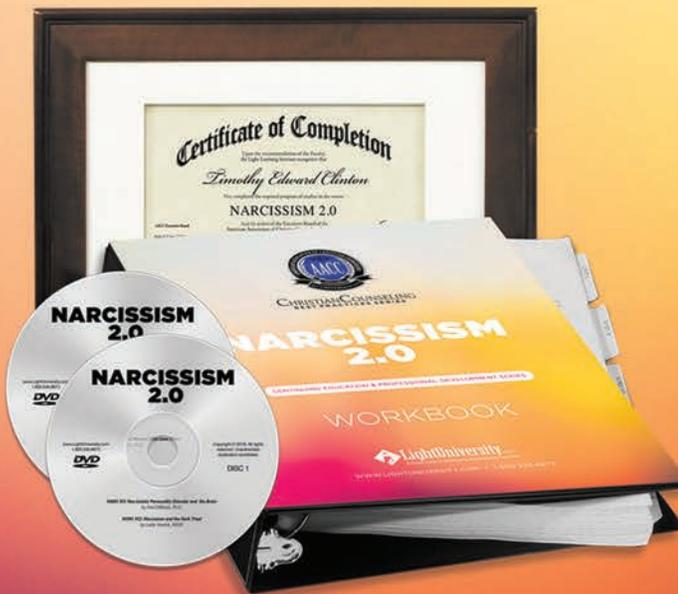
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