

■ COVER FEATURE

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#STRUGGLES

WHEN DID YOU BEGIN TO REALIZE THAT TECHNOLOGY—SPECIFICALLY YOUR SMART PHONE—OWNED YOU, RATHER THAN THE OTHER WAY AROUND?

My wife, Amy, tried for quite some time to help me see that I was constantly on my phone and missing the people in front of me. I always managed to rationalize my actions by telling myself what I was doing was important. Then one holiday, we had all our family over to enjoy time together. After a nice lunch, I glanced up from doing something on my phone and saw everyone in the room staring at their own devices. The most important people in my life were all gathered together under one roof and yet everyone's attention was somewhere else. That's when I realized that something needed to change. I had to start with my own behavior. I decided I'd continue to enjoy the benefits of technology and social media, but I'd refuse to be mastered by it.

WHILE TECHNOLOGY HAS HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT ON MANY PEOPLE'S LIVES, ARE WE ONLY NOW BEGINNING TO COME TO TERMS WITH SOME OF THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING WEDDED TO OUR PHONES AND DEVICES? WHAT ARE SOME OF THESE CONSEQUENCES?

While there are so many obvious benefits of using social media and technology, we are also starting to recognize a lot of unintended negative consequences as well.

One is that people are becoming increasingly dissatisfied and discontented after looking at social media. One study indicated that after looking at Facebook for simply 30 minutes, 1/3 of the people felt more depressed citing "envy" as the source of their emotions. My friend Pastor Steven Furtick describes this as comparing other people's highlight reels with our behind the scenes. No wonder we are dissatisfied. The reality is that the more we compare ourselves with others on social media, the less satisfied we are.

We're longing for connection, and though we get a degree of it online, we crave something more. Most people I know will admit that the more they interact online, the more they crave face to face intimacy yet have an increasingly difficult time finding it.

Experts now refer to something called "deferred loneliness." For example, if I am feeling alone, I might post a photo to Instagram and then go back to see how many likes I received or what others said about what

I posted. This temporarily relieves the loneliness but it doesn't satisfy. I'm simply deferring the loneliness for later.

We're also very selective in what we share. We want to show our best selves. So we filter our shots, create the perfect caption, select the hashtag that will draw the most attention, and post the "me we want them to see." The problem is that the more filtered our lives become the less authentic we really are.

YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY SOMEONE WHO HAS USED TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY IN YOUR MINISTRY. HOW HAVE YOU TRIED TO HARNESS THE POSITIVE AND HELPFUL ASPECTS OF TECHNOLOGY, WHILE REDUCING SOME OF THE MORE HARMFUL, ADDICTIVE ASPECTS?

As a church, we love to leverage technology in every way we can to share the gospel and connect with people. We were honored to create the YouVersion Bible App that we give for free and is now on nearly 200 million devices. I'm personally active on Periscope, Twitter, Instagram, and occasionally Facebook to encourage others spiritually and to learn what's going on in other people's lives.

Truthfully though, I take regular breaks from social media. Probably eight to ten times a year, I take a whole week away from social media. For one thing, that stops me from wondering what people are saying about me. For another, it helps me value the people who are in front of me. This discipline reminds me that technology is here to serve me. I'm not a slave to it.

CAN YOU SHARE A FEW OF YOUR DIGITAL TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA?

- 1) Thou shalt put God first in all you say and post.
- 2) Thou shalt love others as you want to be loved.
- 3) Thou shalt use it to facilitate, not replace, real relationships.
- 4) Thou shalt use it, not be controlled by it as an idol.
- 5) Thou shalt turn your virtual cheek to posts that offend thee.
- 6) Thou shalt not post out of emotion.
- 7) Thou shalt always reflect Jesus, loving God whether online or off.
- 8) Thou shalt not use it to fuel temptations.
- 9) Thou shalt form your own opinions, not follow the crowd.
- 10) Thou shalt not get your identity from what people think.



WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS THE BIGGEST NEGATIVE IMPACT THAT TECHNOLOGY IS HAVING ON OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND ON SOCIETY IN GENERAL? HOW CAN THIS BE REVERSED?

I'd suggest two main problems. One is that people are finding their identity in how many followers they have and how many likes they receive instead of who they are in Christ. Sadly, too many are living for likes while longing for love.

The second issue is that people are tethered to their devices and missing real life in front of them. In fact, over 66% of the general public and 77% of 18-24 year olds panic when they don't have their phones nearby. One study indicates that 58% of people won't go one waking hour without checking their phone. Our addiction is so bad that 80% of teenagers actually sleep with their phones.

In both issues I've listed, we must find balance. We are not the sum total of our likes and followers. We are who God says we are. Someone said, "Social media is a lot like money. It makes a great servant but a horrible master." Therefore we must do whatever it takes to not become its slave.

THERE ARE IMPORTANT NEEDS PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO GET MET THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOU MENTION A NUMBER OF THEM, INCLUDING CONTENTMENT, REST, INTIMACY AND WORSHIP. COULD YOU TALK ABOUT WHY SOCIAL MEDIA ALWAYS FAILS TO DELIVER ON THESE?

Social media and technology make a lot of promises and actually deliver on many of them. You can catch up with what's going on in the lives of people you love or admire. You can comment, like and affirm others on their post, photo, video, or SnapChat story.

But we have to keep things in balance. You can't hug someone over social media. It's challenging for a comment to comfort someone who's hurting. And you can't high five someone, look into their eyes, or celebrate well by simply liking a post.

We need to take an honest look at our lives. If we're bored and our default response is to pick up our devices to scroll through what others have chosen to post, we might be missing out on important reflection and personal growth. We have to be intentional. Social media and technology can supplement our relationships—but it can't replace them. ❏