

Technology and the Christian

Some Thoughts

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Do we as Christians, and in particular Christian men, have a responsibility to think deeply and respond wisely to the proliferation of technological gadgets in our lives? I believe we do. God calls us to be wise in all of the areas of our lives, and considering the fact that technology plays a major part in our lives these days, we need to be sure that we are using it wisely. There is a sense in which things seem to be getting out of hand. Now before anyone jumps to conclusions, let it be known that I am a technology junky. I like to look at all the new gadgets. Thirty years ago I was the first to bring a computer into the school where I taught. Since then I have followed with great interest the development of not only the PC, but also cell phones, Ipods, and tablet computers. So I am not just an old man complaining about all of the new fangled stuff. I like the new fangled stuff! In this booklet, I hope to help us think through some of the implications of the technology we use and the impact it may have on our Christian life and on our relationships with others.

Distraction

The first area I would like us to consider is the area of distraction vs. attention. I have a real concern about how our devices are limiting our ability to focus and pay attention to one thing at a time. You probably know the feeling. You're involved in a face to face conversation with someone and your cell phone vibrates in your pocket or you hear the tones from your computer that let you know that an email has arrived. You are now faced with a choice. Do you slide the phone out of your pocket to see what email has arrived? Do you excuse yourself from the conversation to go check the computer to see what the email is about? Many people would do the first. Not so many people would actually get up and leave the room to check on their email message. But, even if you don't follow through in either case, your train of thought has been interrupted and there is one part of your brain that wonders who's trying to communicate with you. You've been distracted.

A similar scenario can take place while you're reading your Bible or praying. The interruption has the effect of breaking your concentration and introduces a question in your mind as to what the message might be. Even if that lasts for only a second, it takes effort to get back onto the train of thought that was interrupted. If this happens often enough in life, your brain actually changes its wiring so that it becomes harder and harder to focus for stretches of time. (See *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* by Nicholas Carr)

Tim Challies asserts, "Our brains actually change in response to new technologies. The brain of a person raised in the age of print, a person who learned from books and who read books in time of leisure or study, has a brain that is markedly different from a person who has learned primarily from images or who has watched videos in times of leisure or study." (*The Next Story*, page 44)

One of the interesting things about all of these interruptions is that very few of them are important. Your deep contemplation of the love of God might have been broken by the tone that ultimately lets you know that someone "Liked" the description of breakfast you posted on Facebook.

I don't want to make this too complex, but our system for responding to external input consists of three basic areas – the alerting, the orienting and the executive networks. The alerting lets us know what inputs are around us. The orienting helps us select what we pay attention to out of the millions of available inputs at any moment. The executive network is in charge of attention and helps resolve all of the areas of the brain that are responding to the inputs from your world. (*Distracted*, page 23) When our executive network gets overloaded trying to handle all of the inputs, we feel overwhelmed, fearful and frustrated. In *Distracted* Maggie Jackson states that "People who focus well report feeling

less fear, frustration, and sadness day to day, partly because they can literally deploy their attention away from negatives in life.” In other words their executive network is able to manage all it is given to control and so the frustration is lower.

In another place Maggie Jackson writes, “Executive attention (which directs judgment, planning, and self-control) is a precious commodity. Relying on multitasking as a way of life, we chop up our opportunities and abilities to make big-picture sense of the world and pursue our long-term goals. In the name of efficiency we are diluting some of the essential qualities that make us human.” (*Distracted*, page 80)

Tim Challies writes:

“Harvard Medical School, is recognized as one of the world’s foremost experts on attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. After years of studying and treating ADHD, Hallowell began to note a similar disorder.... He termed this condition attention deficit trait. ADT is a product of the digital world, a result of our obsession with information—our desire to surround ourselves with it, with more of it, all the time. In an interview with CNET News, Hallowell observed, 'It’s a condition induced by modern life, in which you’ve become so busy attending to so many inputs and outputs that you become increasingly distracted, irritable, impulsive, restless, and, over the long term, underachieving.' People will know they’ve succumbed to it 'when they start answering questions in ways that are more superficial, more hurried, than they usually would; when their reservoir of new ideas starts to run dry; when they find themselves working ever-longer hours and sleeping less, exercising less, spending free time with friends less, and in general putting in more hours but getting less production overall.’” In other words, they will know they’ve got it when they find that they no longer have time or ability to give to building relationships or to fulfilling their God-given mandate that they work, create, innovate. Arising as a direct result of overloading the brain’s internal circuitry with too much input, ADT carries significant consequences. Hallowell states, 'Aside from underachievement, you don’t ever get the fulfillment of seeing yourself coming up with the ideas you ought to come up with.’” (*The Next Story*, pages 138-139)

My motivation for bringing in these technical descriptions is to make us aware of the dangers that exist by too much multitasking enhanced by our personal technologies. God wants us to be able to get the big picture. He wants us to be able to think deeply about truth and focus on His word and its implications in our lives. Nicholas Carr writes, “The more you multitask, the less deliberate you become and the less able to think and reason out a problem.” (*The Shallows*, page 140)

Carr goes on, “The influx of competing messages that we receive whenever we go online not only overloads our working memory; it makes it much harder for our frontal lobes to concentrate our attention on any one thing. The process of memory consolidation can't even get started. The more we use the web, the more we train our brain to be distracted.” (*Shallows*, page 194).

If we are continuously distracted, we cannot see the big picture and think deeply and therefore we will be less than God wants us to be in our growth in Christ-likeness. In addition, it is much more difficult to store information into our long term memory and therefore the portions of the Word of God which should be in our brains don't stick.

It is a difficult thing to work against the trend toward impulsiveness and distractedness. The “rewiring” of our brains to undo the distracted state can be accomplished

but it takes work and effort. It requires us to have motivation and self control. Scripture teaches us that these are important qualities.

Proverbs 25:28 reads, “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” I don’t know about you, but I don’t want my life to be like a vulnerable city where there is no protection.

In Titus 2:2 we read, “Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, *self-controlled*, sound in faith and steadfastness.” Then they are urged in verse 6 to “urge the younger men to be *self-controlled*.”

In I Peter 4:7, “The end of all things is at hand; therefore be *self-controlled* and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.”

Finally, in 2 Peter 1:5 he tells us to “make every effort (*ie. be diligent*) to supplement your faith with...” Using every effort and diligence we have, we are supposed to add certain virtues to our faith. Among the things we are to diligently add is self-control.

Let me challenge all of us as Christians to be diligent in our efforts to master ourselves. Do not kid yourself into thinking that this is an easy process. It takes effort. What better area would there be to put that into practice than in the area of technology? Men love to consider strength and its development as a virtue. Let’s work on building the strength required to master ourselves in the area of our technological devices. Self control is part of the fruit of the Spirit and as such we have the resource of God and His power to enable us to accomplish this goal.

Challies agrees, “The challenge facing us is clear. We need to relearn how to think, and we need to discipline ourselves to think deeply, conquering the distractions in our lives so that we can live deeply. We must rediscover how to be truly thoughtful Christians, as we seek to live with virtue in the aftermath of the digital explosion.” (*The Next Story, page 117*)

I’m going to provide some suggestions as to how to retake control and rewire your brain back to a less distracted state. It can be done, but it is difficult. It must be something you really want to do. The following are suggestions, not rules. Depending on your situation, you may find some more helpful than others.

1. Discipline yourself to check email at set times in the day—perhaps first thing in the morning, once in the middle of the day and then again once in the evening. This of course is not referring to email you need to be attending to as part of your job. But even then, when work is over, do not refer to work email at all. This same suggestion applies to your Facebook and Twitter access as well. Schedule times and don't look at it in between.
2. Learn to disregard email or message alerts until the appointed time. If you are reading an online newspaper and the email icon shows up, don’t interrupt your reading to check on the email. Teach yourself to avoid the urge to switch gears. Remember, you are trying to program your brain to focus for longer stretches of time, not shorter ones. This will seem difficult and you will ask yourself why you should wait. The answer is that it is good for your brain. Even in my work setting, I learned that I did much better if I forced myself to finish one task before breaking to check email.
3. When you are working on tasks that don't involve the computer, don't just leave your computer up and logged in to email, Facebook or other social media. Your temptation to check it out will be strong every time you walk by your computer.

4. Read a good book or serious magazine articles. Force yourself to attend to it for a long stretch of time, 30 minutes or more, without looking at your phone and without trying to watch TV at the same time. If you can't read for that long of a time, start with a shorter time and then build up your endurance and concentration.
5. Resist the urge to look at your phone every time you sense a message has come in. Don't resort to your phone every time you think of a question – What temperature is it? Why is the deer population so high? What year was the first Chevy Impala produced? You don't have to know the answer to every question just because it crossed your mind. Reaching for your phone every five minutes is an addictive behavior. Take control and resist the urge, no matter how much it hurts.
6. Make it a matter of specific prayer, asking God to enable you to extend your ability to focus and pay attention. But at the same time take the needed steps to break bad habits.
7. Be faithful in having a daily time in prayer and in the Word. Force this to be an undistracted time. Make it a priority ahead of email and Facebook.
8. If you are a parent, let me encourage you to help your children adopt better technology practices in order to avoid the issues discussed here. Apply the above list of suggestions to your children. In addition, research shows that teens need 9.5 hours of sleep per night. Many teens keep their cell phones nearby during sleep and even if they don't respond to it, the sensation of alerting them to an incoming message disrupts the deep sleep necessary for properly wiring the mind and sorting out learning from the previous day. I would keep all technology out of children and teens bedrooms.
9. Reduce the time your children spend with technology. In spite of what they say, they will not die if they can't be in constant contact with their friends.
10. Lengthening a child's attention span begins long before they begin to use technology. Reduce the number of inputs your small children are subject to. If they have 50 toys to pick from for play time, the choices involved create conflicts in their decision-making. Reduce the choices and encourage them to finish playing with one category of toys before switching to another. Switching gears frequently and having too many choices all the time contributes to a low attention span and trains the brain to be distracted.

Idolatry

One of the important things for us as Christians to recognize regarding technology is that it can become an idol, either in itself or in the perceived benefits it provides.

Tim Challies observes, “There are always spiritual realities linked to our use of technology. We know that there is often a link between our use of technology and idolatry, that our idols are often good things that want to become ultimate things in our lives. Communication with others is just this sort of good thing, a very good thing that can so easily become an ultimate thing—an idol in our hearts. How can we tell if something has become an idol in our lives? One possible sign of idolatry is when we devote an inordinate amount of time and attention to something, when we feel less than complete without it. It may be something that we look at right before we go to sleep and the first thing we give our attention to when we wake up. It may be the kind of thing that keeps us awake, even in the middle of the night.” (*The Next Story*, page 74)

Challies gives us several indications as to when a thing might be becoming an idol. One of the things he mentions is the devotion of an inordinate amount of time to something or anything we feel incomplete without. Haven't you felt these inclinations in yourself when it comes to your smart phone or computer? Haven't you felt the sensation that says, “What do I do now?” when your phone or computer is out of order? Do you feel compelled to check your Facebook page before you do almost anything else in the morning? Almost certainly most of us check email or Facebook before we even check in with God in prayer or read His Word. That indicates the possibility of an idolatrous situation taking place.

One author suggests that people have begun to see technology and the Internet as a sort of spiritual existence: “Many see in cyberspace nothing less than a new, spiritual heaven that is open to all who are computer literate, that is, 'baptized,' some observe. Cyberspace gives us the means to realize 'a dream thousands of years old: the dream of transcending the physical world, fully alive, at will, to dwell in some Beyond—to be empowered or enlightened there, alone or with others, and to return,' writes editor Michael Benedikt in the influential essay collection *Cyberspace: First Steps*.” (*Distracted*, page 51)

People have always had the tendency to be attracted by the idea out-of-body experiences and existence. The Internet gives them that capability to a degree. They don't have to be real, they can become strong online when they are weak in person. They can be beautiful online when they may be plain in person. Such capabilities are alluring to some people and take on an idolatrous tug.

Challies says that we need to figure out what idol we may be serving. “What is really happening here? Why do we feel this constant need to communicate with others? What idol are we serving? There are any number of idols we may be serving through the tools of communication technology:

- We may be serving the idol of productivity, communicating so that we feel as though we are being productive, constantly answering work-related e-mails or monitoring work-related social media platforms, feeling the need to respond instantly and decisively morning, noon, or night.
- We may be serving the idol of significance, finding a sense of value in the number of people who notice us and interact with us. People with an idol of significance will measure their success or popularity by the number of friends they have on Facebook or the number of followers on Twitter. They make popularity something that can be measured and analyzed and feel that their own significance increases as more people pay attention to them and interact with them online.

- It may be that the very desire for information is an idol for us, that we feel as if having more information holds the key to living a better life.” (*The Next Story*, page 75)

One type of sin that I think is related to the idol of significance that Challies mentions is the twin sins of pride and envy. Now that we have the ability to inform all of our friends about every move we make, there is a tendency to mention things that we secretly hope will arouse a certain amount of jealousy. Let's let people know about our latte at Starbucks or the powerful engine in our new truck. Why not inform people that you are having a fantastic time in Bermuda during the middle of a cold winter. I need to be careful here because it is possible to inform friends of these things without having any intention of arousing their jealousy, but it seems to me there is a danger here that we need to be alert to. Even in the case when our own motive might be pure, we need to learn to have caution as to how we might be provoking others through our carelessness. As Christians we are not supposed to be causing others to stumble and when we blatantly announce every new purchase or exciting adventure, we may be triggering jealousy in others.

The Bible tells us to flee idolatry. The natural tendency when one reads an article such as this one is to go immediately into self-defense mode and to deny that anything close to idolatry exists in our lives. A more prudent reaction would be to go to God humbly and ask Him to reveal to us any areas of our life where he is not first. Ask Him for wisdom to determine whether something about technology – having it, jealousy of others, pride and boasting in social media or anything else has become an idol.

The Bible tells us in 1 John 2:15 that we should not love the world. A love of the world is an indication that the love of the Father is not in us. John then goes on to tell us what things demonstrate this love of the world. 1 John 2:16 “For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world.”

I'm sure if we look carefully and think deeply, we can see that there is potential for each of these three characteristics of worldly focus to be present in our use of technology. As Christians, let's take steps to recognize God in His proper place and put our technology in its proper place – a place of helpfulness and productivity, but not the place of control and mastery. As Paul said, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, **but I will not be brought under the power of any.**” 1 Corinthians 6:12 (Emphasis mine)

Here are some steps that might help us determine whether some technology (or anything) is becoming an idol in our lives.

1. Evaluate the amount of time you spend with technology playing games, mindlessly hopping around the Internet, checking Facebook posts, etc., compared to the amount of time you spend in the scriptures, praying, meditating, etc.
2. Examine the attraction of the technology compared to the attraction of other things. When you first get up in the morning, is your first instinct to check Facebook or email, or do you get showered, dressed, and have devotions before checking in with our technology?
3. Ask yourself how you would feel if you had a technology-free week with the only exception being voice phone calls. Is the feeling similar to the feeling you would have if you missed your Bible reading, prayer and church attendance for a week?

When you follow the trail of your time, energy, affection, and money, you find a throne.
And whatever or whomever is on that throne is the object of your worship. ~Louie Giglio

Importance of Reading

In the previous two sections I have discussed the fact that some of our technology has a way of increasing our distractedness and decreasing our ability to attend to or focus on a task for an extended period of time. In addition technology has the potential to become an idol for us. One of the reasons that these issues concern me as a Christian is that God has chosen to reveal Himself to us through His Word. That is, He has communicated with the human race through written words. If we do not know how to read, the communication from God is hindered. But most of us know how to read. The problem many have is the inability to focus for an extended amount of time in order to think about and analyze what God has said. In addition to not being able to focus, we have the problem of not being able to think deeply about the text.

In Joshua 1:8 God says, "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night." He goes on to explain that meditating on it brings success in our lives. This is not the kind of success to which most Americans aspire, but it is the kind of success Christians should work toward. It is the successful life of faith that builds a strong relationship with God and with other people. This success is founded on the wisdom of God that is gained as we think about and reflect on what God has said.

But in contradiction to this, we have developed a culture that is focused more on the visual media such as TV, movies and Internet browsing.

Here's an example of the time spent per day by percentages of young people on various media:

watch television: 84 percent 3:04 hours

use a computer 54 percent 48 minutes

read a magazine 47 percent 14 minutes

read a book 46 percent 23 minutes

play video games 41 percent 32 minutes at console; 17 minutes with handheld

watch videos/dvd 39 percent 32 minutes

watch prerecorded TV 21 percent 14 minutes

go to a movie; 13 percent.

(Dumbest, page 89)

There are many hindrances to extended thinking and meditating on God's Word. One of the more recent hindrances is the growing inability to focus on anything for an extended length of time. We are becoming more accustomed to reading web pages where there are multiple windows open begging us to look at them to see what is being advertised or what new event has been posted to Facebook. Throughout most of the texts we read online there are hyperlinks that tempt us to click in order to follow some rabbit trail of thought. While this helps us to extend our knowledge in some way, it also interrupts the flow of thought. Even if we don't click on the link, we are interrupted by the split-second thought of the possibility of clicking on it. As I mentioned previously, these constant interruptions of our train of thought change the way we think so that it becomes more and more difficult to focus for an extended period of time. Just ask someone under the age of 35 how it would feel to sit down for 30 or 40 minutes to read their Bible and think about it, with no background music, no TV, no cell phone beeps, and no interruptions of any kind. Just the thought of it brings

pain and panic. Or how about asking them to listen to even an interesting lecture for 45 minutes? More pain and more panic.

Nicholas Carr, in his book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, explains that research shows that the average person spends between 19 and 27 seconds at the most on any web page he visits. How can a person who is used to this kind of scanning, sit down and hear from God through His Word? You simply can't take in a page of Scripture in 19 seconds! Rather than doing a lot of reading ourselves and encouraging our children to read, we spend time in front of the TV or with our computers and teach our children to do the same!

Consider the important impact reading time has on student performance in school:

“Buried in the depths of the Kaiser report Generation M is a startling finding about different media use and student achievement. It shows that leisure reading of any kind correlates more closely with a student's grades than any other media. While eighth to 18 year olds with high and low grades differed by only one minute in TV time, they differed in reading time by 17 minutes, (46-29) a huge discrepancy in relative terms (a 36 percent drop in leisure reading for kids with low grades.” (*Dumbest, page 90*) What this is saying is that students with low grades spend considerably less time reading than students with good grades.

We've become addicted to our screens: “*The screen...promotes multitasking and discourages single-tasking, hampering the deliberate focus on a single text, a discrete problem. 'Screen mindedness' prizes using search engines and clicking 20 websites not the plodding, 10 hour passage through a 300 page novel. It searches for information, fast, too impatient for the long-term acquisition of facts and stories and principles.*” (*Dumbest, page 115*)

This kind of multitasking and rapid skimming is detrimental to grasping the facts, stories and principles found in any text, but most important for us, God's Word.

If you are a Christian, you need to take this information seriously. As a parent, you need to make sure that your young person is not losing his ability to concentrate. You have a responsibility to set the example and then establish the expectation that in your home there will be technology-free times when time is devoted to quiet reading and meditation. Just writing the previous sentence sounded strange. When does anyone have time where there is no input from TV, radio, or the Internet? Some people will suggest that reading is a thing of the past and is no longer necessary in our time when our technology serves as the conduit for our information. The problem is, and you need to think about this carefully – the problem is that the God of the universe has chosen to speak to us in written words. Those who cannot read those words either because of illiteracy or inability to focus will not hear from God!

But, you may say, is it necessary to read? What about listening to God's Word? Doesn't that count? The answer is yes, but how often does anyone sit and listen to the Word of God being read to them? How easy is it in our video-centric culture to sit and listen to words being read for an extended period of time with no other interruptions or input. I think you can see that listening happens less than reading does and is at least equally difficult.

One of the things educators and researchers are noticing is that we are becoming good at skimming, but we are losing our ability to interpret what we read accurately as well as the ability to think carefully and deeply about what we read. The reason this is important is that when God communicates through words, He is communicating truth and concepts that are not necessarily understood with a quick skim. Many of the sentences in the Bible are long and complex and many modern readers are unable to understand such complexity whether it is in the Bible or a book about the Bible. Think about how important this is. God desires to speak to us through His Word and we may be unable to understand what He is saying

because we have become surface readers and have not trained our minds to think deeply and logically about what He is saying. That's something that should not be dismissed lightly.

So let me encourage those of you who desire to be faithful to God to train yourself to put aside the technology and focus on the Word of God for extended amounts of time. Let me encourage you to insist that the children for whom you are responsible do the same. They will grumble and complain, but it is essential for them to learn how to hear from God.

Read to children early in their life and then encourage them to read for themselves throughout their growing up years. Have regular conversations with your children. You'll be keeping the relationship strong and at the same time you will be giving them the vocabulary they need to navigate through life.

Mark Bauerlein writes, "Everything depends on the oral and written language the infant-toddler-child-teen hears and reads throughout the day, for the amount of vocabulary learned inside the fifth-grade classroom alone doesn't come close to the amount needed to understand fifth-grade textbooks. They need a social life and a home life that deliver requisite words to them, put them into practice, and coax kids to speak them." (*Dumbest, page 138*)

This is especially true in the Christian home where you want your children to pick up the vocabulary that they need to describe God's relationship to man and our relationship to Him. In a recent study of adolescents and twenty-somethings, it was observed that young people simply do not have the vocabulary to describe their thoughts and feelings about God and the truths the Bible teaches about God.

Another thing that the all-encompassing presence of technology does is allows us to pursue topics that are of interest to us and to avoid topics that we don't think are all that interesting. We can have it our way. Now when it comes to educating our children and ourselves, it's important to expose ourselves to things we may not necessarily be interested in. When someone proposes a class in some unfamiliar area of Christian doctrine, there is a tendency to avoid that class or to allow your children to avoid such a study.

Bauerlein writes, "For education to happen, people must encounter worthwhile things outside their sphere of interest and brainpower. Knowledge grows, skills improve, tastes refine, and conscience ripens only if the experiences bear a degree of unfamiliarity." (*Dumbest, page 145*)

From this I take it that we shouldn't try to get off easy when it comes to what kind of learning we subject ourselves or our children to. If we continually read things that we are already interested in we won't learn much. With our technology the tendency is to read about and follow trains of thought that are of interest to us. Because there is so much information available, we do not need to explore the unknown or difficult. One would think that having the proliferation of technology would allow people to learn more and grow more. But the natural tendency is the reverse. It is not natural to delve into something difficult or that we think we wouldn't understand. But if we don't, our minds won't be strengthened.

As technology moves along there is a tendency to substitute web reading for book reading. As an older person who was raised on books, I find that I read the web much the same way I read a book. This is not the case with younger readers. And if I spend more and more time reading online rather than in a linear text such as a book, my brain will be affected and changed as well. Book reading affects regions of the brain for language, memory and visual processing whereas web reading affects the brain areas for decision making and problem solving. (*Dumbest, page 120*) Why the difference? Because when reading the web there are hyperlinks and ads and other messages along the periphery of the text that causes your brain to constantly be making decisions as to the relative importance of these links.

Deep reading is hindered by problem solving. Intelligence requires taking things into short term memory and then weaving it into conceptual schemas in long term memory. If our problem solving areas of the brain are active, the concentration and focus aren't there to transfer information into long term memory. Our problem solving capacity has been using up brain power to decide on which links to click on or avoid. This can overload working memory which results in distractedness, "understanding" weakened by overloading

Why am I emphasizing all of this detail? Because I think we as Christians should have an idea of what's at stake. As we read the Bible and religious texts about the Bible and Christian devotional life, God wants us to meditate and reflect deeply on the truths they contain. In order for that to happen, we need to understand what we read and then take that information deeply into our lives where all sorts of interconnections can be made so that it affects our life. It's important to understand that out-of-control technology and its resulting distractedness can rewire our brain in such a way that understanding and assimilating the truths of Scripture can be severely impaired. We certainly shouldn't want that to happen to ourselves, and we especially need to be careful to prevent that from happening to those who are most susceptible to this danger, our children.

So what are some concrete steps you can take to help prevent this from happening to you and your children?

1. Limit exposure to visual media – whether it be TV, videos or web-based media. I remember way back when our kids were small, my wife was concerned about Sesame Street. Everyone was proclaiming the virtues of such educational material, but she wasn't so sure. In retrospect, after having observed middle school and high school students up close in an educational setting for over 40 years, I believe she was right. The images on programs such as Sesame Street change every couple of minutes either causing or adding to children's inability to focus for long stretches of time.
2. Encourage creative, imaginative play. Reduce the number of choices children have to play with at any given time. When your children are faced with which one of 20 different toys they should play with at any given moment, it increases the decision making part of the brain, but reduces the thoughtful part.
3. Read to your children often and encourage them to read when they are old enough. Let them see you reading, thus setting a good example that they will want to follow.
4. When using technology personally or with children, use it for specific purposes and reduce the impulsivity of it. In other words, don't jump to the technology to fill every 5 minute void in something to do. Don't give your children the example of interrupting one activity with another as demanded by your technology. In other words, when you are writing in a word processing program, as I am right now, don't keep switching to see all of the world-shaping events in the news and weather and Facebook changes that have taken place in the last 5 minutes. Let it be obvious that you stay on a task for extended periods of time and teach them to do the same.
5. Don't allow children to have the technology in their rooms. Let everything be out in the open so that you can see and control how its used.
6. As strange as it sounds, create times of quiet in the house where kids can read and work on homework while parents read a book or magazine. Leave the TV off. Make sure cell phones are unavailable for texting or web browsing after a certain time.
7. Teach your children explicitly how to use technology as I've outlined it here. If they need to do word processing, provide a computer that has no Internet connection or games so that they only use the tool for one thing. They must be overtly taught the skill of focus rather than distraction.

Technology and Relationships

I think all of us have seen the bizarre sight of a man and woman across from each other in a restaurant each texting or talking to someone else. I saw something similar to this on a beautiful evening while walking down the sidewalk. Toward me came a man and woman walking side by side. Both of them had a phone up to their ear talking to someone elsewhere. It seemed to me that in so doing they were missing both the potential communication with the other person as well as all of the interesting sights and sounds of their actual location.

Why do we do this to ourselves? What is it about remote contacts that is more interesting than those we are with? There is a danger here that I don't think many people think about. If the person you are with is someone near and dear to you like a wife or a child, and if you repeatedly move yourself from attending to them to attending to someone else (or something else), the relationship changes and is ultimately harmed in some way. It may not be over night, but in time the relationship will not be as strong as it should be.

We are already familiar with the jokes about the husband who is distracted by a newspaper or a ball game when his wife is trying to talk to him. Think about how much greater the barrier is when there is an actual person on the other end of a conversation who is getting precedence over one's own spouse. This kind of thing will certainly happen from time to time, but let's just imagine the scenario that every evening one spouse is texting some invisible person to the neglect of the person right there in front of him. Doesn't that have the potential to break down the communication and put distance between the two of them? What if they both are doing it? They are each receiving some sort of fulfilling input from a source other than their spouse. Over time, this has to have a damaging effect on the relationship.

Read what one anonymous reader posted on my blog in response to a technology article:

*I read through what you wrote.....my comment combines a few, as I am having jealousy issues with my husband's cell, FB usage, iPad etc. Mostly it is the cell phone usage with access to FB. We have only been married a short time *less than a year* and this is a big issue for me- as it takes away from our time together whether at home, at restaurants, the mall, even at times, at church. Lately I have been praying for patience and understanding....understanding as to why he chooses it over me. We also, btw, have 4 kids with us at any given time. I am going to read through some of the other postings for enlightenment. But, my stance is: these pieces (cell, iPad, FB) can hurt a person or a relationship just by sucking up the TIME it takes away from a loved one.*

Let's consider another scenario. A family of five is home for the evening for a change. Dad and mom decide to watch a movie. The children don't want to watch that particular movie so the first child goes to his room to watch something he's interested in on his computer. The next child props his feet up in the family room and listens to his favorite playlist on his Ipad. And the last child texts back and forth with one of her friends from school. In some homes this is normal. It happens every day. Do you see a problem here? The family is together, but not communicating.

Next consider the fact that self-centeredness is fed by this scenario. No one has to learn to appreciate the other person's taste in music or movies. No one has to learn to share. Everyone can have what suits himself. Sister is not required to talk to brother if she doesn't want to. While this might seem like a reasonable thing in today's world, for the Christian it is not the direction we want to go.

I've discovered that living the Christian life is an extremely difficult thing especially when it comes to our relationships with others, especially when those others are members of our family. If we are to become the kind of people God wants us to be, don't we have to learn the skills that He values?

Let's look at some relevant scripture passages:

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church *and gave himself for it*. (Emphasis mine.)

Philippians 2:3 In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Romans 12:10 In honor giving preference to one another

Galatians 5:13 Through love serve one another.

Deuteronomy 6:7 You shall teach them (God's words) diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Romans 15:1-2 Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification.

After reading passages such as these, I learn that my role as husband and father is one that is supposed to be other focused. I am to be attentive to the needs of my wife, not only giving preference to her, but making sure that she is built up spiritually and emotionally. I am to esteem her as better than myself when it comes to preferences in the use of time, money and activities. I am not to be focused on pleasing myself but on her good so she can be built up in her faith and character.

In addition, I am to spend time at all times of the day in order to instill in my children the words and commandments of God. My focus personally and for my family is one that is to have a God-ward direction. I'm to make sure that I am teaching my children to be focused on the needs and interests of others rather than the natural tendency to focus on self.

However, when I make arrangements for each of my children to have his/her own electronic entertainment, I am teaching them that they don't have to learn to cater to the desires and preferences of others. I am teaching them that each of us can have what we want. Some may argue that such arrangements are not taking away from the preferences of others because they too get to listen to or watch what they want. But the issue is in learning to communicate and submitting to one another. It's difficult to let another person have the choice of the music that I have to listen to or the movie we're going to watch. Why should I have to watch a movie my sister picked out?! My selfish self rebels against this. If we all have to watch the same movie or listen to the same music and share the same space, we learn to put others first and to share. This doesn't come naturally, but it is what God wants from us. And as parents we need to make our daily instruction an integral part of our dialogue throughout the day's activities. Our decisions about how we use technology impact that daily instruction. If everyone including parents is distracted with their own movie, playlist, Facebook page and text messages, where are the opportunities going to come from for sharing the Christian life with one another?

It takes time to build and nurture relationships. It takes time for me to nurture the relationship with my wife and children, and it takes a lot of practice for children to learn to relate with each other in the way I'm describing. The fact that our technology has become ubiquitous and personal has worked against us in the area of personal relationships. In fact just this week as I was working on this, (January 2012), CNN had an article on how multitasking hinders young people's social skills.

<http://www.cnn.com/2012/01/25/tech/social-media/multitasking-kids/index.html>)

We need to take steps to reverse the trend and nurture the personal relationships in our lives the way God intended. As parents we need to make sure we are fulfilling God's desire for us to train up our children in the way they should go. As spouses we need to fulfill God's design for marriage by being all there for our spouse throughout the moments of every day.

As I was thinking through the thoughts I shared last time, I was thinking through the difference between the way we interact with technology and the way we used to interact with newspapers or books. We've all seen the older sitcoms where a woman would be trying to speak to her husband, but he would be hiding behind a newspaper. He was shutting her out of his world during the time he was reading the paper.

My dad was a pastor. He loved to read and so he almost always had a book with him. When we'd go on vacation, as soon as he had a chance, he would sit down somewhere in the shade and read his book. This would sometimes perturb my mother because she often had other ideas of what she would rather have him do with his time, especially time she considered to be family time.

In both of these scenarios, it's important for a husband to learn to be attentive to the needs and desires of his wife and family. It was still possible to be withdrawn and separated from those around us even when the technology consisted of paper and ink.

But I've been asking myself the question as to whether our issue today is just another version of the same thing or is it fundamentally different. On the surface there are some of the same issues. I can be reading the daily news on my Ipod when my wife wants to get my attention about something. An Ipod isn't as big as a newspaper and so she can easily see my face. Or, I can be on vacation and when I think I have a good opportunity, I can go off somewhere and read a book on a Kindle. Is this different or the same as what happened in previous generations?

On another level, the two media pose completely different circumstances that I think we as Christians need to look at very carefully. With print media, one is normally locked into one task. When I'm reading a book, everyone around me knows I'm reading a book. If I decide I'd like to check on the yesterday's sports scores, I will put down the book and go pick up the newspaper. If my son is reading the sports page, I have to wait until he's finished. I don't know how other people are, but very seldom, if I had five minutes of free time between getting dressed and leaving for work would I go find my book, pick it up, and read a page. Because I wasn't used to so much distraction and multi-tasking, my brain didn't think it needed to find some little thing to do during every quiet space in the day.

How do things differ now with technology? Let me use myself as an example. I have an Ipod Touch that I use for just about everything except typing. I mean I can study my Bible, check the weather, read the news, read any number of different books, play games, text people, send out tweets, check on Facebook, etc. Because I am older, I tend to use this tool more like I would the device it replaces. In other words, when I read, I tend to read it the way I would a book. Younger people tend to be much more distracted and multi-tasking

than I am. But having said that, I have noticed some tendencies that automatically come with this type of technology.

I may be reading my Bible and meditating on it, but then wonder what today's weather is going to be like. So almost in mid-sentence I may switch over and check the weather. Then I'll wonder what the 10-day outlook is and so might check that out. Needless to say, this breaks my train of thought. I may be reading another book when I wonder if anyone has posted a response to a grandchild's picture I posted on Facebook and so might switch over there to see what's been happening. Someone there may have referenced a cute YouTube video and so I might check that out and chuckle as I see the inane antics of some 2 year old. Meanwhile, the thoughts evoked by the book I was reading are long gone.

All of the previous events can take place while I'm "reading" a text. But what about all of the other snippets of time that are spread throughout the day? We have a tendency to check in with the technology in almost every spare minute. There is a draw there that was not present in the newspaper and book. I'm not saying there is anything innately wrong about that, but it has a pull. Can't you feel it? You have a few minutes while your wife is putting dishes in the dishwasher and so you check out the sports scores. She comes in the living room to find you looking at your phone. It was just a few seconds and you found out what you wanted to know and so you put it down. Later on there's a lull in the conversation, if you ever got started in a conversation, and so you check to see if anyone has updated Facebook. In a few more minutes you remember that you had put a bid on Ebay and so you check your email for a minute to see if there's a message there regarding your bid. Again you set your phone aside, only to hear the familiar tone that tells you someone has texted you. It would be rude to leave it until tomorrow so you quickly check to see what that was about. Oh, it was only Culver's restaurant telling you you could get a buy one get one free Sundae on Thursday between 4 and 5 pm. That was important, wasn't it? Through all of this you are pulled aside from conversation with your wife or distracting you from what your children are doing. Rather than talking to or playing with them, you are fiddling with your phone.

Another difference I've discovered about technology media compared to print media is that it tends to hold our attention more. Often that's because a video is somehow involved, or because the communication is fluid. That is it's changing. There are new postings and responses all of the time. It used to be when a person was reading a book and another person in the room wanted to say something, it wasn't too difficult to pull the attention away from the book to listen to the other person. When that happened to me, I would usually put a finger down where I had left off and then listen to what was being said and reply back and forth if that was called for. Now, when someone interrupts a person using a computer or phone or other device, it's hard for the person to break away. There's a tendency to keep looking back at the device that has grabbed our attention. This leaves the other person feeling like they are not as important as whatever it is that's showing on the screen.

One other related issue is that it used to be that when family gathered in the living room after a meal or whatever, they would easily carry on conversations. Even if someone was browsing a magazine or knitting or something like that, the conversation could continue. When there were normal lulls in the conversation, someone would bring up another topic and the conversation would continue. What's happening now is that we feel the tug to keep doing something "profitable" during those lulls and so we pull out the phone or computer so that we can keep tabs on something else, other than what's going on in the room. The problem is that it is not as easy to return to the conversation again and people don't know whether to interrupt or not. Some people even plan ahead so that they have their device ready for those lulls. When they do this, it looks to others like they are prepared for

the conversation to be uninteresting and unimportant. It sends exactly the opposite signal from the one we should be sending.

God is interested in interpersonal relationships. The members of the trinity have loved each other since eternity past and have been carrying on a loving communicating relationship forever. When God created us, he created us in his image. One of the things that means is that he created us as communicating beings. He gave us faces so that we could see one another as we communicated. We could read each others facial expressions, point of focus, eye movements, and so on. Proverbs 15:30 says the light of the eyes rejoices the heart.

In his book *The Next Story*, Tim Challies explains that before the fall, God and man had direct communication. (page 93) He calls this *immediate* communication. The prefix *im* means *not*, as in *immature*, meaning not mature. So immediate communication is communication that is not mediated. In other words it is face to face with no intervening medium. Challies contends that this is God's preference and ideal. He writes, "I would argue that it [mediated communication] is, in fact, a lower form of communication, one that is intended to be a mere supplement to our lives. The best relationships we can have are not those that rely on mediation, but rather the ones that allow for unmediated contact and communication." By unmediated contact he means face to face communication. I agree with this assessment. We thank God for means of communication that allow us to be in contact with family and friends that are far away. Sending a letter or email or text message allows us to communicate with those with whom we cannot have immediate communication.

When we were first created, God had face-to-face communication with us. After the fall, God basically turned aside in a way and Adam for his part hid so God couldn't see him. Ultimately God sent Jesus Christ to be the mediator between God and man so that fellowship and communion could exist. God wants immediate communication with us and he desires that we have immediate communication with one another.

But what's happening now is that we turn our backs on the immediate communication we could be having with family or friends who are right with us and communicating in a mediated way with others. We are neglecting what is arguably the ideal method of communication and substituting an inferior type of communication on purpose. Besides switching to an inferior mode of communication, it is often communication with someone who is further removed from us relationally than those right around us.

In her book *Distracted*, Maggie Jackson writes, "Moreover, a boundaryless world means that coming home doesn't signal the end of the workday anymore than being on vacation is a time of pure relaxation or being under one roof marks the beginning of unadulterated family time. We rarely are completely present in one moment or for one another....To cope and to keep up with our pulsing personal orbits, we live in worlds of our own making, grazing from separate menus, plugged into our own bedroom-based media centers, adhering to customized schedules. ... Seventeen percent of the families in the UCLA study consistently ate dinner together. On weekdays, the parents and at least one child came together in a room just 16 percent of their time at home. True, hours together don't automatically translate into intimacy. But if we can't be bothered to keep coming together in the fullest, richest sense of the word, we lose the opportunity to form those deeper bonds. ... Are we losing our willingness to wade down into the painful, soulful depths of human relations? 'When you can have a face-to-face conversation, do you? When you're right in very close proximity, do you bother?' asked Ochs. 'I'm afraid we're going to wake up and think, 'Oh my gosh, we could have been having a conversation.''"

My hope is that as Christians, we will not be absorbed into the world's way of thinking about these things. Relationships are important to God. Satan would do all that he

can to disrupt and destroy relationships because good relationships are an image of God and he hates that image to be portrayed with all of the love and self-sacrifice that is an accurate portrayal of God.

Our technologies, as helpful as they are, have the capacity to disrupt and break down the most crucial and intimate relationships of the home and family. We must not be naive about this. We must be on the alert and take active steps to counter the communication breaking aspects of our technology. It makes no sense to use less than ideal communication media to communicate with people who are further removed from us when the people we should be caring for are right there and the means to communicate face-to-face is immediately available.

So what are some steps we could take to counterbalance the tendencies we've discussed? Two choices are not really possible. The first is to throw our hands in the air and say we can't fight it. It's too hard and we can't make any progress. The other choice is to say that the good old days were better. Let's get rid of all the technology and return to a previous life. That is not going to happen. So what can we do?

1. Realize and accept the fact that you do have the power to control the technology and to manage it for the glory of God.
2. On the personal level, make the conscious decision that "wherever you are, be all there." (Jim Elliott)
3. Based on the previous decision, refuse to take cell calls, look at text messages or emails during times that call for your participation listening and interacting with others. That would mean during meal times either at home or in restaurants when you're with others.
4. Be careful even during group events such as watching a movie or ball game together. I have discussed the implications of multi-tasking on the brain as well as the importance of being involved socially with others and so if you are involved in a shared experience, participate in that experience without being distracted by your technology.
5. If you're in the kind of setting where reading a physical magazine, book or newspaper would be appropriate, you should be able to read any of these on an electronic device as well. But beware of the tendency to jump from thing to thing. Control your self. Do not allow yourself to be controlled by the technology. Stay tuned to those around you so that you can be involved. If there are conversations going on around you, pay attention to one of them and join in. You don't want to hear, "... isn't that right, Roger," and not know what they are talking about. It is not only embarrassing, it's rude.
6. Whether you're with others or not, control the urge to flit around the internet, hitting links in an almost mindless way. Your brain will become less able to focus. If you find yourself doing this, find something constructive to do either with or without technology, but find something you can focus on for a long stretch.
7. If you are a parent this and the following suggestions are for you. Restrict cell phone use. Children do not need to be in communication with their friends at all hours. Perhaps they have a cell phone for safety reasons while away from home, but all phones go on the recharging table when they are home.
8. There's no good reason for children and teens to have smart phones. The Internet is not a safe place. As a young man told me just yesterday, "There is no good reason for a 15 year old boy to have unlimited and unrestricted access to what's on the Internet."

9. Children and teens shouldn't have TV or computers in their bedrooms. Everything done on a computer should be out in the open in public.
10. If you allow your children to use Facebook or other social media, you must be their friend online and read through what gets posted both to and from them. Be disciplined about this. It is part of your job. When they have new friend requests, ask them, "Who is that?"
11. Teach your children electronic etiquette – No phones during meals; don't interrupt a conversation with a friend to take a call or check a text message; etc.

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Technology and Sexual Temptation

As Christians we believe that the Bible is God's word to man, and a Christian man who is trying to be faithful to his Lord will try to govern his life according to God's will as given in the Bible.

The purpose of this series of articles has been to examine the relationship between technology and the Christian. In this last section I want to look at the issue of technology and sexual temptation. However, I think that in order to explain the sexual implications of technology I need to lay the groundwork of a few principles from the Bible that I'm assuming in this discussion.

The first thing we need to remember is that God created sex and sexuality. Sex in itself is not a dirty or vulgar thing. It is a God-given gift. Next we need to remember that God has told us in Scripture that sex is to be enjoyed, but that enjoyment is to be within the relationship of marriage between a man and a woman. All through the Bible the rightful sexual relationship within marriage is praised and held up as a joyful thing, not as a vulgar thing.

After Adam sinned, man's nature became sinful in all areas of his being and strong desires, which the Bible calls lusts, began to have a dominant force in a person's life. The Bible says that the strong desires of the body (or the flesh as the Bible describes it), the strong desires coming through our vision, and the pride of life are not from God the Father, but are part of the world system. (I John 2:16) These strong desires are very difficult to overcome and without the Spirit of God at work, it's almost impossible.

When a person comes to Christ, God gives him His Spirit and divine power to enable him to overcome these desires and to live a life that pleases God. We need to recognize that God has given us commands and directives because He is the one who created us and He knows best what is good for our well-being. We should never look at the commandments of God as though they were meant to spoil our fun. When we buy a product, a manufacturer will enclose a list of instructions that show the proper way to use the device. For example, we are perhaps not supposed to use the device in the water. It may cause damage to the device or injury to us. These are rules written by the ones who know best how things are supposed to work. The same is true of God's rules for us.

The Bible describes sexual sin with several different terms. One term, *porneia*, is used for any sexual sin that is outside of the norm and standard that God designed. The Greek word I referred to here you will recognize as the root word for our word *pornography*. Another Greek term is translated *adultery* and usually refers to sexual sin committed by a married person. Another couple of terms refer to sexual sin as *uncleanness* or *lewdness*. God uses all of these words to describe sins whereby we violate God's standard for our sexual behavior.

Let's look at some of the descriptions the Bible lays out. Let's start with what Jesus actually said. In Mark 7:21 Jesus, speaking about the fact that sin comes from within a man, says, "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality (*porneia, fornication*),...adultery, ...sensuality (*lewdness, sexual excess*). All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Notice a couple of things here. First of all they come from within. The Bible says that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. (Jeremiah 17:9) So the source of our difficulty is not from the outside, but is from within. James writes that "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

Next we see that Jesus describes these actions as evil. Most of what happens sexually in our culture is not considered evil by most people. The Bible has a different approach. It

makes a clear cut statement that sexual immorality is to be avoided and shunned. Lastly we notice that they defile a person. We defile ourselves from what comes from within ourselves. Defilement means we make ourselves dirty and unfit for service for God

Paul, writing to the Romans in 13:13 says, “Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality (*free and easy sex*) and sensuality.” In the next verse he tells us to make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” In other words, we should not make it easy to serve our lusts. Paul writes similar things to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 12:21.

To the Ephesians in 5:3 he writes, “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking which are out of place. Be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” In other words, God's wrath is coming because people engage in these behaviors. Why would we as Christians want to be a participant?

Finally, let's look at what the Apostle Peter wrote in his first letter. In 4:2 he says that we should live “no longer for human passions but for the will of God. The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality (*lewdness, sexual excess*), passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.” He is basically saying that we need to put our past behavior behind us and live for God from here on out. And the life we live for God is different than the description of our past life. Christians don't behave the same as non-Christians when it comes to sexuality.

With that background in mind, how does technology fit into the picture? Technology, whether it is TV, video, or Internet based can bring us realistic portrayals of sexual situations that in turn trigger the strong sexual desires that are built into us. With men, the strong desires that are aroused through what we see can be very powerful. The Bible calls these lusts. These lusts then can give rise to sin if not dealt with.

Jesus tells us that, “whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:28. From this simple statement we can see that Jesus' standard is very high. If we are to avoid this kind of potential sexual sin, we need to take precautions. Jesus' very next statement is to say that if our eye offends us, we should pluck it out. Now we could debate whether he was serious or whether he was using hyperbole to prove a point, but nevertheless, it's obvious he takes this very seriously and we should take whatever precautions we can to avoid this sort of sinning. The Apostle Peter wrote to his readers, “I beg you to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” (1 Peter 2:11) Peter knew that lusts and strong desires can actually make war against our very souls. We are to abstain from such lusts. They can harm us deep within our psyche. Paul told Timothy to flee from such lusts. So the admonition for us is to do whatever we can to avoid situations that produce these self-destructive lusts and enable them to flourish.

The problem with lust is that it is never satisfied. Sexual immorality of all kinds promises that it will meet the inner longings of our souls, but it never does. We are trapped into an ever deepening desire for more and the satisfaction we derive from our sin becomes less and less. God's secret to happiness is what Jesus taught the people in the Sermon on the Mount—Happy is the man who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. While this seems totally foreign to the modern mind it is God's way of finding satisfaction. Do we believe God or the world system? Our direction and focus needs to be toward a life of righteousness.

In Ephesians 5:10, Paul tells us that we should find out what pleases the Lord. In verse 11 he tells us not to have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, and then in verse 12 he explains that it is shameful to even speak about things which are done by

them in secret. In other words, there are things that displease God that people do in secret and it's shameful for Christians to even speak about these things. But isn't this what happens when we view certain scenes on TV or over the Internet? Aren't we looking in on what people are doing or talking about in secret?

So let's take these ideas and put them together. We as Christians are to avoid the immorality that is initiated in our minds by the things which we see; and we are to not even talk about the kinds of things that people do under the cover of darkness or in secret. Focusing our attention on these things can trigger strong desires that war on our souls and do great spiritual damage.

So what does that tell us about TV viewing for example? Doesn't this mean that we should take every precaution in our viewing to avoid those programs and commercials that either trigger immoral thoughts in our minds, or display or discuss immoral activities in detail? In this case, I'm not even talking about pornography. I'm just suggesting that we take great care not to become careless and accustomed to immorality and casual sexual content because in doing so, our own minds can become fertile ground for imagined sexual activity that Jesus condemns.

If these things are true, then what does that say about actual pornography? There's no question that exposure to graphic sexual material will produce strong sexual lusts in our minds and in our bodies that we cannot legitimately act upon from God's point of view. This being the case, we as Christian men need to take every precaution to avoid getting ourselves into the trap that pornography represents.

Technology itself can be addicting as we have discussed before. When you add pornography to the technology, you have a powerful mix. The Bible often speaks of diligence when it comes to the Christian life. It takes a great deal of diligence to avoid the entrapping nature of pornography. What are some of the things we can do to avoid the trap?

First I think we need to look at our lives to see if we really have the desire to live a life that is honoring to God no matter what the cost. This is where a lot of it falls down. We may claim that we are Christians, and we very well may be, but we don't really want to sacrifice the time and attention that it takes to live a consistent, biblical, righteous Christian life. We may enjoy our sin too much! We may believe that God isn't really interested in our good if He would withhold all of these things from us and ask us to live such a narrow life. So we need to make up our minds. Do we want a God-honoring life or not?

Second, we need to look at our personal spiritual disciplines carefully. Are we regularly taking the time to pray? Are we reading, studying and meditating on the Scriptures regularly? Are we regularly involved with other Christians in fellowship, prayer and ministry? If not, we are making ourselves vulnerable in many areas including our sexuality. If you are weak in any of these areas, take immediate steps to improve. Start today by getting in the Word and taking time to pray. Don't make any excuses to miss church on Sunday. If there's a church prayer meeting going on somewhere near you, be there.

In addition to making sure our Christian life is being supported the way it needs to be, here are some other steps you can take to increase accountability and provide protection for yourself and your family.

1. Make sure TV viewing is open and public within the home. Children should not have televisions in their rooms where they can watch what they want without supervision.
2. If you live alone and can't control what you watch, get rid of the TV. If you can't handle the Internet, have it disconnected (Remember Jesus telling us to pluck out our eye or cut off our arm?)

3. Computer use should be open and public within the home—for everyone. Children should not have computers with Internet access or DVD capabilities in their rooms. They may fight you on this and tell you what every other child gets to have, but that's ok. We are Christians who desire to please God and so we have different procedures.

4. Husbands, give your wife complete access to your computer, your browsing history, your Facebook passwords... everything. Ask your wife to keep you accountable.

5. Establish an accountability partner who has your permission to ask you anything he wants about your viewing and browsing habits.

6. If necessary, sign up for a filtering service that will email your browsing history to your wife or an accountability person.

7. If possible, avoid owning a smart phone. Under no circumstances should teenagers have a smart phone. That sounds radical, I know, but why do any of us have to have access to the Internet 24/7? Do you honestly think a 16 year old boy can keep away from pornography if he has Internet access on his phone wherever he is? Think about it! If your son wants to

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