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GRACE & PEACE

An E-periodical for spiritual enlightenment, edification and encouragement

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Pitfalls of **SOCIAL MEDIA**

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DIGITAL DISCIPLINE

One of the most serious challenges Generation Z faces today is the uncontrolled social media consumption. Many educationists and psychologists all over the world strongly advocate for an outright ban on social media for children. Some others think a replacement of online content is a must for children under a certain age.

One thing is clear: even the secular world is alarmed at the destructive aspects of social media. So, how much more serious should God's people be in looking at the pros and cons of the latest developments in information technology? It is high time we realized that limitless exposure to the internet is dangerous and detrimental to us.

SENSE THE DANGER

Sensing the seriousness of this issue, we are focussing on the various aspects of digital discipline to safeguard ourselves and our people everywhere.

After an introductory note on the use and abuse of modern technology, you will find a very profitable meditation on 2 Timothy 2:22 by Dr Joel Albert. Apostle Paul's exhortation to young Timothy has been aptly applied in the context of digital discipline. Our brother addresses the challenges of digital platforms and the pathway to discipline.

SET SAFEGUARDS

The story of Daniel and his friends challenges every generation to live godly in a hostile

world. Brother Febin Johnson wisely picks up three important lessons from them that can help us to live a holy and separated life in this digital world.

Brother John Lee elaborates on the pitfalls of the digital world. After briefly analysing the root cause for all failures he presents some valuable biblical ways to spiritual victory, with a special emphasis on the abounding grace available in Christ.

Brother Paulson Joshua lists several advantages as well as disadvantages of digital technology and presents five biblical principles to protect ourselves from the dangers of the virtual world.

Finally, presenting the gospel truth, Bro. Aby Kuruvilla cautions the readers against neglecting the dangers hidden in the digital space. He calls upon the readers to be aware of the flesh within us that attracts the filthy content of the internet and be delivered from it through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The useful tips given at the end will help one immensely to develop healthy digital habits.

May the Lord continue to bless and guide you as you go through these pages so that you will be more challenged to lead a holy and righteous life amid a crooked generation.

Thank you very much for your encouragement and prayers.

TECHNOLOGY: HELP OR HINDRANCE?

No one can deny the impact of the digital revolution on our times. We live in an era of rapid growth in every aspect of modern technology. We have achieved so much that our forefathers never even dreamt of, particularly in the field of information technology.

Smartphones and web technology have phenomenally changed the way man communicates. Virtually, everything is possible with a smartphone. Education, consultation, marketing, marriage alliances, socializing, banking, shopping and whatever you name, everything is done today online!

So, the modern man cannot think of a moment when he is not connected. He wants to be updated on everything under heaven. What is the outcome? A wired generation! Always plugged in, they don't care about anything else. They are in a different world. Sad, instead of using technological innovations as a good servant, man allows technology to master over him.

It's amazing; there are thousands of young men and women who work freely for certain tech giants. Seldom have they realized that these online promoters, especially of the social media make money at the expense of our time and energy.

Abuse

Many believers also follow the trend. Even when they attend serious spiritual services, their attention is on their phones, checking for updates. Once I happened to see an elderly believer watching YouTube while the breaking of bread service was going on. No doubt there are useful, educational contents available online but it's dangerous to surf the net without any



Responding to a call or message in the midst of a programme cannot be considered as a sin, yet it should in the most important cases. Never forget when we are in a spiritual service not only we have to honour the organizers but the Lord God Almighty Himself, who is in our midst according to His promise.

What is the result of such abuse?

We are forced to consume anything that is found in the social media. That will

distract us from our primary responsibilities and even corrupt our minds.

One young man says from experience, ‘After spending 18 hours daily playing online games for a couple of weeks, I was unable to speak, made mistakes while writing, could not look at people while talking’.

Yes, the unrestricted use of internet and the digital devices is playing havoc in the lives of many, especially the younger generation. Apart from obesity, speech retardation, and other health problems, experts find such people fail in their social skills. They do not have a better interpersonal relationship. They are only comfortable socializing online!

God’s people must be aware of the consequences of such abuse of technology. If the secular world is concerned about the overuse of it, how much more we should be? Apostle Paul says poignantly, “All things are lawful to 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).

Priority

Even as we use modern technology for good, we should never become slaves to such things. We should be clear about our

priorities. The God-given facilities should not become a hindrance. If a digital device hinders our devotion to the Lord or fellowship with the saints, it’s a big loss. If we cannot set a time to be away from such appliances, it is an addiction.



According to certain experts ‘symptoms of digital addiction is identical in nature to chemical addiction’. In other words, just as we take the addiction to drugs seriously, we ought to look at digital addiction too, for it affects the entire area of one’s life, mental, spiritual, social etc.

Let us honour God, respect His word, and not forget our priorities. God and His purposes alone must be pre-eminent in a believer’s life. Paul adds further, “... those who buy (be) as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.” (1 Corinthians 7:30c, 31)

Yes, let’s use technology but do not abuse it. Undue consideration for the possessions in life is materialism. Let us not be engrossed in electronic devices but use them with caution and discipline. Make sure our Lord is pleased and His name is glorified in all that we do, even when we are online.

NTK

*“Good habits are hard to acquire but easy to live with.
Bad habits are easy to acquire but hard to live with.”*

Author Unknown

OUTLINE

George W. Noble

CHRISTIAN'S PLACE IN THE WORLD

1. Sent in to the world, John 17: 18; 20:21.
2. Preaching to the world, Mark 16:15.
3. The light of the world, Phil 2:15; Matt 5:14.
4. Live godly in the world, Titus 2:12.
5. Not conformed to the world, Rom 12:2; John 17:15
6. Love not the world, 1John 2:16; 2Tim 4:10
7. Passing through the world, 1Peter 2:11
8. No friendship with the world, James 1:27; 4:4

ANECDOTE

FEEDING A VIPER



It's a true story. Thirty-seven-year-old Sunil Rande played with snakes most of his life. For twelve years he worked as an inspector with the Bombay Society for the prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He has rescued around sixteen thousand snakes during this period.

On October 25, 2009 he died after being bitten by a Russell's viper, one of the most poisonous snakes in India. He rescued it earlier and had kept in his house and used to feed the viper twice a day. On Sunday 25th October while feeding the snake, it bit him. Before he could take anti-venom, he was collapsed, became unconscious and died after 20 minutes.

MEDITATION

Dr. Joel Albert

The **ABC's** of Digital Discipline

Over twenty centuries ago, a great man of God wrote his final letter to a young preacher whom he considered his son in the Lord, just before he finished his course of life in the world. These words of Apostle Paul to Timothy were filled with doctrinal truths

and practical lessons that would apply to believers like us even today.

In 2 Timothy 2:22, he says, “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” This is a

verse that I consider to be one of the foundational principles every believer should live by. Little did Paul know that, twenty centuries later there would be an entire virtual world where believers would struggle to maintain a stronger standard of spiritual living. But God in his foreknowledge inspired him to pen those words that hold true with a greater significance even today.

The verse we just read can be divided into two parts. One starts with the word *flee* and the other one with *follow*. Keeping those two words in mind, let us delve a bit deeper into our habits about technology and gadgets in general by looking at the ABCs of Digital Discipline. Let us look at the PROBLEMS followed by the PATH toward digital discipline.

***Flee* - THE PROBLEMS:**

A. ATTENTION DEFICIT

You see the most common form of videos we interact with are short-form videos which we know as reels, shorts, stories etc. depending on where you're watching it. That, coupled with 'infinite scrolling' or what I like to call 'the bottomless pit of technology' has hooked adults and teens, seniors and children alike. And the result is individuals are in a constant state of distraction.

While they are people trying to use those platforms for good, nevertheless just imagine if our brains are rewired to this state of constant distraction, how difficult it would be to meditate for extended periods, or listen to sermons and messages that go on for 30 minutes to an hour!

B. BEHAVIORAL VARIATIONS

Have you realized that extended screen time has been linked to temper tantrums? The more time we spend online, we are bound to get cranky and angry once it is over or if we are not able to get a screen when we want to. There are many neurological reasons but one of the main ones is the use of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that helps us to experience pleasure and satisfaction. Dopamine is meant to be secreted a few times a day so that it is replenished and available when needed. Every time we watch a video or play games online, it gives a dopamine rush and this continuous secretion of dopamine results in its depletion which then makes us feel tired, sleepless and angry.

Only the Lord, through His word, can give us the peace 'that surpasses all understanding'. No comedy videos, serials or movies will be able to do that. They will give you a rush of pleasure and energy but will make you feel more depressed the moment you shut them off.

The word of God is not like that! When we receive peace and comfort from meditating, studying and hearing the word transcends circumstances, problems and worries.

C. COMPANIONSHIP CONFUSED

One of the greatest fallacies about social media is that it can help us to be in touch with people we know and like. Just in the past decade, having dealt with many youngsters and adults alike, one common theme was seen in our experience in the ministry. If I had to make a statistical

analysis of the pros and cons of social media using this cohort of people I've interacted with for moral issues, the cons outweigh the pros by an astounding margin. From a 15-year-old to a 50-year-old believer known to us, chatting online has led them to fall into sin and go away from the Lord.

Whether it is Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or even WhatsApp, the number of people who have slipped into sin because of these apps is reason enough for us to stay out of it.

We recently challenged the youths in our local assembly to delete all social media and spend more time with like-minded believers and the response from a good number of youths was very positive. It may not be the only step needed to stay away from immorality but it's a significant step in the right direction.

Yes, we would be in the minority, but let me assure you, if you don't look toward Sodom, you will not be attracted to it like Lot. Instead, you'll be able to take the difficult uphill journey to Hebron (fellowship, communion) and the plains of Mamre like Abraham, where the Lord can come and talk to you just like he did with Abraham, but in a spiritual sense of course.

So what is the solution?

Can we stay away from technology and gadgets in this day and age? It would be wishful thinking but I'm sure there is a strong middle ground. You see, we are reading this e-magazine on a screen! That means there are certain steps that we can follow, what we would call the **PATH OF DIGITAL DISCIPLINE**

Follow: **THE PATH OF DIGITAL DISCIPLINE**

I. ACCOUNTABILITY

While counseling youngsters and young couples alike, there is a clause of accountability that we speak about. There are biometric locks to most of our phones like fingerprint scanners and face ID or even a PIN. We strongly urge youngsters that until they get married, their parents should have access to their phones and the day they get married; their spouse should continue to have that access.

That keeps us accountable, not to fall into sin. There are various other ways to have accountability through which we ensure that there are multiple layers of protection to keep us away from accessing anything wrong.



II. BENEFITS

The World Wide Web is a world in itself. And it has very good resources for us to use. One excellent use case scenario for me has been the availability of Strong's Concordance; see the original Hebrew and Greek words and their meanings and much more at the touch of our fingertips. Earlier it would require searching the big book manually to study and understand the original biblical words. The amount of

resources, versions of scripture, out-of-print books etc. are enough for a student of the word to be content and happy.

However, it is to be noted that we should still take care while we are on the internet because we're just one click away from an entire world of filth right on the same browser.

III. CUTTING OFF

I would open a can of worms if I said that cell phones and tablets have no place inside an assembly hall or on the pulpit. Many of us use our devices to access multiple versions of scripture, write notes and even to access notes that we have typed or written. Every single youth conference we go to have this question - can we use our devices instead of a Bible?

All I would say out of my own experience with myself and others is to be careful. I was recently in a meeting where a youngster next to me was using a tablet to access two versions and I thought to myself, "Oh, look at a youngster using a device wisely". Just a minute later, he received a text message, and for the rest of the message, his 'Bible' tab was in the background and the WhatsApp conversation took precedence over the voice of the most high God coming to him. I'm just speaking of the latest instance, there are many, and you would agree.



I believe that the 'real' scripture instead of the 'virtual' should always be with us. Yes, we may use the device to access our notes on the pulpit but a good yardstick would be to have a 'real' bible in our hand, anything else being secondary to it, to be used with utmost caution and reverence to the Lord and to His word.

Also, I would go to the extent of urging you, my dear brethren, to unsubscribe from OTT platforms. We say believers are not supposed to go to movie theatres, but what about the ones we have in our hands?

TWO WINDOWS

I would conclude by saying, there are two windows in our lives. Every screen is a window to the world. It may show you beautiful things but it's all just a mirage. But then we have the Bible, the window to eternity. It points us to our existence outside the confines of space and time, in the glorious presence of God!

A reality is more real than what we can imagine. Which window are we looking at? May the Lord help us to learn the true value of the Word and stay away from the ways of the world. It requires discipline, but that discipline would make us true disciples of the Lord.

“First we build our habits; then our habits build us.”

Author Unknown

STUDY

Febin Johnson

THRIVING IN DIGITAL INFLUENCE

We are in the midst of the most significant technological revolution in the history of human beings, surpassing even the impact of the Industrial Revolution. Never in the history of humankind has seen such vast growth and influence as technology has in human lives today.

Christians across the world have been witnessing the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy of the increase of knowledge in the last days (Daniel 12: 4). The digital world is characterized by the widespread adoption of digital technologies such as the internet, mobile devices, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing, are restructuring every aspect of human life. It all began with the desire for easier life management and the pursuit of satisfaction and pleasure.

Digital World

Living in this digital world, we often forget that we can become addicted and feel like slaves to the devices we rely on for our easy lifestyle. Instead of dominating them, we become controlled and obsessed with their endless use. We now live in a world where screens control almost every aspect of our lives.

However, we should not ignore that digital screens can interfere with everything we do, from our sleep patterns



to our creativity. Instead of conquering the world, we have become slaves to the world through the impact of digital technology.

Scrolling through social media content and reels diverted us from using our time wisely to focus on God and His word. Knowingly or unknowingly, we became captives of digital confinement. Here are three ways how we can thrive in the enslavement of the digital world:

a. Construction of boundary

Daniel and his friends were cautious of the Babylonian influence to conquer them spiritually, culturally, and emotionally, and ultimately win over their lives. Through the growing influence of the digital platform, the world wants to have the same grip on our lives so that we think and live like the world. We forget the truth that we are not meant to fit in and flow with the world. Instead, we are called to thrive in the enslavement of the world. It is possible only through building a wall of separation from the world.

In Daniel 1:8, we read “But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with King’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.”

This shows that he created a clear boundary in the face of the Babylonian world's attempts to influence and assimilate him. He established a barrier amid the king's efforts to dominate and confuse. Despite being forced to live in Babylon, he refused to let Babylonian culture influence him and instead chose to live as a committed Jew in Babylon.

b. Confidence in Identity

As Daniel and his associates were chosen to serve in the king’s palace, the chief official changed their names which honored the true God Yahweh and their identity in Him. The name Daniel means “Elohim is my judge”; Hananiah, “Yahweh is gracious”; Mishael, “Who is like Elohim?”; and Azariah, “Yahweh helps.” Their names were their identity. And it was closely attached to their belief, their God, and their practice.

But they were given a new name that honored Babylonian gods. It was an attempt to confuse and reorient them away from Yahweh and toward the pagan gods of Babylon. This is the same approach that the world takes when it influences us. Through various digital content, we unknowingly give ourselves to be identified with the world instead of standing firm in our identity in Christ. Giving us worldly interests and spreading

worldly ideologies in our thinking, the digital world confuses us and deconstructs our faith in Christ.

c. Conviction of nationality

Daniel and his friends viewed Babylonian life as a temporal arrangement and prioritized the Jewish lifestyle significantly. Because they knew they were strangers and foreigners in Babylon and that they were citizens of another country. The inbuilt reality of who they were dominated their outward lifestyle. Thus, they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims (exiles) on earth because their nationality of another country was ingrained in them. Peter, in his first epistle, addresses the scattered believers as the “elect exiles” (1 Peter 1:1). Throughout his letter, he reminds the truth of our nationality that we are aliens in this world, (1 Peter 1:17; 2:11). The title “elect exiles” offers a glimpse into the unique identity and calling that we have in Christ.

We are simultaneously God’s chosen ones and exiles in this world. We are heaven’s refugees on the earth, living like homeless and landless, suffering the hardships of not being in our native land. Because our true citizenship is in heaven, (Philippians 3:20).

Not of this world

Standing before Pontius Pilot, Jesus made it clear that he represented another Kingdom. “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight so that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).

In this digital world, living as strangers or foreigners means that our identity and allegiance are ultimately rooted in our relationship with God rather than in the worldly influences, circumstances, or cultural norms surrounding us. We are

called to live distinctively, guided by the values and principles of God's word and His kingdom, even if it means being out of step with the prevailing influence of modern technology, and culture or facing challenges as we navigate life in this world.

PRACTICAL-1

John Lee

PROTECTION from Pitfalls of SOCIAL MEDIA

Have you ever wondered who runs the show? Are you managing your access to social media, or is it managing you?

Smartphones and social media apps are brilliant examples of the danger of acting without thinking, and the strange tendency to open up through technology in a way we never would in person.

In this age of nearly uninhibited and incessant information and entertainment, we can be deluged with tweets, texts, emails, instant messages, talk radio, 24-hour news, 30-second sound bites etc. The sheer amount of input is enormous.

PITFALLS

While social media has many advantages, it is important to be mindful of the potential disadvantages and strive for a balance in using it for spiritual growth.

- It is obvious that the devil is also using the social media to promote another Jesus, another spirit and another gospel to mislead the believers from the simplicity and the purity that is in Christ. (II Corinthians 11:3).
- It can be a distraction from spending time with God. With all the entertainment options



available at our fingertips, it can be easy to prioritize browsing social media over spending time reading the Bible or praying. This can hinder our spiritual growth and intimacy with God.

- It can lead to comparison and discontentment. Social media platforms often present a filtered and idealized version of people's lives, leading us to compare ourselves and feel inadequate.

Therefore, it can be a stumbling block to our moral and doctrinal purity, and ability to be content, and grateful for blessing in our own lives.

THE ROOT

There is not a single believer who doesn't struggle mightily with control of his thought life. Job said, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). From the teachings of Our Saviour, the root of defilement lies within the heart of man (Mark 7:20-23). Evil thoughts and actions stem from within.

It is important to control our thought life as believers. We have the internal battle between our fleshly desires and the call to obedience to Christ.

The question is not who struggles with this problem, but who gains victory over this problem?

WAY TO VICTORY

• WEAPONS OF WARFARE

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, the spiritual nature of our warfare and the need for divine empowerment to overcome strongholds. Our weapons are not worldly but are mighty through God for tearing down strongholds and bringing every thought into captivity to Christ.

• CASTING DOWN IMAGINATIONS

This involves actively rejecting and dismantling thoughts and imaginations that contradict the word of God. It requires discernment and vigilance over the content we allow into our minds.

• FOCUS ON POSITIVE VIRTUES

Philippians 4:8 exhorts believers to intentionally focus their minds on things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. This deliberate choice influences our character and behaviour.

• MIND DIET

Just as we carefully watch our physical diet, we should also be attentive to what we consume mentally. Engaging in a "Daily Data Dump," where we consciously rid ourselves of harmful influences and replace them with wholesome content can help maintain purity of thought. Proverbs 6:27 says, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned"?

• CHILDLIKE SIMPLICITY

We wrongly think that as we grow and mature we can handle certain things. However, like children, our minds too are like sponges – defilement in, defilement out. Despite our maturity, our minds remain susceptible to influence, absorbing what we expose them to. Hence, we must guard against contamination by surrounding ourselves with morally edifying influences.

• TRANSFORMATION AND ACTION

Righteous thinking leads to righteous actions. The correlation between our thought life and our behaviour highlights the importance of aligning our actions with our beliefs. Constant transformation of minds changes our actions too. (Romans 12:2).

• ENJOYING GOD'S PEACE

Paul concludes Philippians 4: 4 – 7 by emphasizing the peace that comes from right thinking and righteous living. As we align our thoughts and actions with God's will, we experience His peace that surpasses all understanding. Therefore, it is the need of the hour to actively engage in the battle of our thought life, relying on God's strength and transforming our minds through intentional focus on what is virtuous and pleasing to Him.

GRACE AVAILABLE

This article is intended to be preventative, but it is possible a reader has already fallen victim to this temptation. It is not to increase your guilt, but to offer a warning against future mistakes. God fully forgives sin, including sexual sin. Cherish the cross of Christ and rejoice in the mercy God extends. (Psalm 51; 1Co 6:9-11; 1Jn 1:7-9)

For older saints reading these lines, remember that you might not have smartphones available in our teen years – and what sort of trouble might you have gotten yourselves into if you did? “Smartphones do not invent new sins; they simply amplify every extant temptation of life. Old temptations are given new levels of attraction and addiction and accessibility.” But God is always gracious.

GLORIFYING CHRIST

Now is the time to take control on using social media, rather than letting it control us. By being mindful of the potential pitfalls of it, setting boundaries, and prioritizing real relationships, you can navigate this digital age with wisdom and grace.

Remember, God’s grace is always available to help us to overcome any struggle we may face. So, let us take charge of our thoughts, time, and interactions and strive to live a life that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ in all aspects.

PRACTICAL-2

Paulson Joshua

CONTROL THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

The launch of the iPhone by Apple in 2007 in the smartphone industry helped people in fast information, communication and travel with mobile apps. Ever since digital gadgets have become an integral part of our lives. In this scenario, it would be good to consider briefly of the advantages, disadvantages and the precautions we ought to take.

I. ADVANTAGES

- 1) To have fellowship with one another: Digital technologies enable us to contact any person from any part of the world. We can see and talk personally (Romans 12:5).
- 2) To study the word of God: It provides a lot of information to learn from the word of God in any language and is able to read the bible at any time (Joshua 1:8).
- 3) To help one another: Online platforms allow easy fund transactions at any time and any place to support and care for the believers. (Acts 20:35).
- 4) To Spread the Gospel: It provides various methods to share the gospel with any

person in any place. (Mark 16:15).

- 5) To teach one another: It offers spaces for believers to come together, share their experiences and provide biblical exhortations to encourage and build one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
- 6) To pray to each other: believers can intercede for one another and share prayer requests on the spot from any time and place (James 5:16).
- 7) To have fellowship with sick and disabled people: Those who are not able to travel or are sick can attend the meetings via Zoom.

These examples illustrate how digital technologies can be utilized with biblical principles for spiritual growth and the advancement of God's kingdom.



II. DISADVANTAGES

Just as it has benefits, the digital world has its own peril. Consider these examples.

- 1) It disturbs our concentration: Unrestricted use of digital devices make it difficult to concentrate.
- 2) Prevents us from spending time with others: We should spend quality time with others.
- 3) It makes us neglect spiritual matters: Sometimes we spend so much time on the phone that takes away our time for meditation and prayer.
- 4) It affects our relationships: Online chats are no substitute for real friendships.
- 5) It's harmful to health: Spending too much time online is bad for our health, especially for our eyes, ears, shoulders etc.
- 6) It may spoil our learning and personal growth.

Considering these challenges it's essential to use digital devices responsibly, keeping a balance.

III. PRECAUTIONS

- 1) Guard our Heart: "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life". (Proverbs 4:23). This applies to our digital interactions as well. Be mindful of what we consume online and how it affects our thoughts and beliefs.
- 2) Use Technology to glorify God: The Word of God reminds us, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31) Use technology to honour God and propagate our faith.

- 3) **Beware of Addiction:** Paul says, “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). Be cautious of how technology can lead us into temptation or become a source of addiction.
- 4) **Set Boundaries:** Paul advises, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15-16) Set boundaries for our digital usage to ensure it doesn't consume our time or lead us away from God.
- 5) **Keep a relationship with God:** Amid digital distractions, prioritize our relationship with God. Psalmist says, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” (Psalm 119:105) Find time for prayer, reading the Bible and communicating with our Christian community.

By practicing digital discipline guided by these biblical principles, we can strengthen our faith and glorify God.

NEWS & VIEWS

STARTLING STATISTICS

- On average 5.44 billion people worldwide are active users of the internet, which means 67% of the world population. Out of it, 62.6% (5.7 billion) are social media users.
- In India there are around 751.5 million active internet users.
- There are 487.5 million WhatsApp users in India.
- With 462 million active users, India is the largest YouTube audience in the world, second USA (239 million), and third in Brazil (144 million).
- In the USA 80% of the 18 – 24 age group are avid users of Facebook, 78% Snapchat, and 71% active users of Instagram.
- A survey revealed, 85% of students admitted they wasted time using social media. 60% of students say their sleep pattern is disrupted due to excessive screens, and 35% admitted experiencing emotional instability.
- Some time ago, two professors of Leuven University in Belgium studied 82 young volunteers, to study the state of their mind and social relationships during two weeks of Facebook usage. They found that those who spent more time with this social network site had a deterioration in their well-being than those who used less.

CAUTION FOR THE SOUL

Cautious is a word that immediately attracts our attention. In this present digital age, the need for exercising caution has become ever so important. An ignorant click here or there could make you susceptible to a plethora of cybercrimes. If we don't take caution, we'll end up incurring much loss.

This digital age also makes it easy to access a wide variety of entertainment in a few clicks. Parents try to exercise caution in deciding what their children watch or play in the digital world. But soon they realise their children have figured out how to bypass all guardrails.



SUGAR-COATED POISON

The digital world is tuned to attract the flesh. The flesh craves instant gratification and is never satisfied. The content we consume gets impressed in the heart and mind. Especially if the content is illicit, the heart and mind are damaged with long-lasting consequences. It is like poison sugar-coated.

The Bible cautions us, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov 4:23). Lord Jesus said, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt 15:19). Yet, how often we find our hearts compromised to sin!

The flesh or our innate self is plagued by the disease of sin. The Bible shows us that sin is not something that we do because we are taught it, but something that we do by nature. “For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death” (Rom 7:5).

FREEDOM FROM SIN

Every sin has a consequence. ‘unto death’ solemnly reminds us of God’s standards in judging sin (Rom 6:23). They who die in their sins will be eternally separated from Him to a place of eternal suffering. Oh, we need freedom from the motions of sins that are leading us to destruction!

God in his love has provided for us deliverance in the Lord Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Jesus died in our stead and paid the price of our sins. He rose again from the dead and is a surety of a victorious life to all those who believe in him. We who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are freed from the power of sin and are enabled to live a victorious life with the help of His Spirit (Rom 6:18).

GREATER DANGER

Jesus said, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). The

danger that looms over our souls is far greater than any loss we can incur in this present life. It’s an eternal loss.

The caution we need to take is this – “To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb 3:15). “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom 10:10).

POINTS TO PONDER

FOURTEEN TIPS TO DIGITAL DISCIPLINE

- 1) Intentionally control the use of gadgets. Disable or reduce notifications. Fix a time to check updates. Periodically, even stay away from the virtual place. Unlimited data does not mean to waste our limited time.
- 2) Refuse to respond to calls or messages while attending a spiritual service. It shows our respect for the organizers, fellow participants and the Lord Himself who alone is the pre-eminent one person present there.
- 3) When online, especially on social media, remember we are on a virtual highway. It’s just like a public place like a market. Hence behave as worthy of the Lord.
- 4) Anything we post and share online should bring glory to God, never defile the name of the Lord and His people.
- 5) Avoid sharing something that was originally posted by the enemies of the gospel. Even if we agree on certain parts of the post, why should we promote the mission of the adversary?
- 6) Be very careful before sharing any material online, even if it is with your closest friend. You will never know how far and wide the same post travels and you will be responsible for any harm resulted.
- 7) Don’t just believe everything found online. Cross-check it with the scripture and our local church leaders.
- 8) While it’s commendable to present Biblical truths using digital platforms, using the same to criticise and discredit fellow believers is lamentable.
- 9) It’s natural to have an inclination towards political and social issues, but it’s better to keep it personal. In the digital space, our priority must be the propagation of the word of God.
- 10) Set a tech-free zone like a family dinner, altar etc., when conversation between one another and the Lord is encouraged.
- 11) Teach children about the peril of digital addiction and be an example to them.
- 12) Never forget, when online you are not invisible. All that we do with our digital devices, whether actively or passively is being recorded and analysed.
- 13) Never click on a link forwarded by an unknown person. If not careful such a click would drain away your bank balance.
- 14) Be careful with the pop-up windows and social media suggested posts. The impact of one click will be far more than we could imagine.

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For further details contact:- gracepeaceu@gmail.com

Prepared, and posted by **Nelson Thomas Kumaramparampil (NTK)** for the Glory of God & the Joy of the saints.

Editorial assistance: **Tom Jacob**

Design & Layout: **Jiju Mathew, Dhanya Mohandas**

Technical Support: **Robin Johnson (RJDeals)**

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