

YOUR SOUL AND THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE



Digital Landscape: Spiritual Formation in a Technical World
November 27-December 31, 2022¹

Overview:

Have you ever considered how technology and sociology affect your spiritual formation? The digital tools we interact with regularly create a liturgy that shapes our beliefs, our dreams, and our habits. This series does not seek to disavow the potential impact of easy communication and connections on social media. Rather, we want to encourage clarity about what practices are *most beneficial* to our individual and community formation. The human heart is always being shaped by something, so we must pay attention to what demands our attention.² As Annie Dillard says, “How you spend your days is how you spend your life.” We have choices to make.

Group Objectives:

Relationships and Life Transformation are the primary purpose of community groups

- Reflect on this past Sunday’s message and other devotional reading.
- Pray together and provide encouragement for other group members.
- For each person to understand how they are being shaped by technology and how to create new habits both on- and off-line that shape us to be more like Jesus.

DNA statement(s) tie-in:

- *We are empowered by the Holy Spirit*—The Holy Spirit within us enables us to live a life filled with joy, purpose, and power. We live in a supernatural reality that includes yet transcends the physical universe.
- *We do Life Together*—Every person of every generation is wanted, needed, and known. Relationships thrive on personal interaction, not on digital connections alone.

Conversation Starters:

- What are the apps or websites that you are most drawn to? What do you like about them?
- How has your mobile device enhanced your life in a positive way(s)? What are some of the negatives?
- What differences do you see about how each generation uses technology?
- How would you define the terms “digital native” and “digital immigrant”?

Listening to God

- Where did you see God at work last week? How were you able to join him?

Learning from God’s Word: Bible Study Discussion

Over the next few weeks, dive into Ephesians 4:1-5:20. Paul gives many specific guidelines for how to “live a life worthy of the calling we have received.” Apply these 1st century guidelines to your 21st century existence. Pray before you read; make note of what words and phrases God brings to attention. And remember, “our habits will not change God’s love for us, but God’s love for us should change our habits.”³

¹ This series resource guide was prepared by Dawn Gentry. Consider choosing one conversation starter, one passage, and one specific “next step” to apply each week.

² Justin Whitmel Earley, *Habits of the Household: Practicing the Story of God in Everyday Family Rhythms*, (Zondervan, 2021), p 95.

³ Earley, *Habits of the Household*, p 146.

- **Read Ephesians 4:1-16**
 - Verse 2 calls us to be humble, gentle, and patient. Where have you seen these traits evidenced on social media? How might you exhibit these fruits of the spirit in your online interactions?
 - Verses 12-13 share the goals of building up the body of Christ, becoming mature, and having unity in the faith. Talk about a time you were able to use technology to encourage these traits in a fellow believer (or when you were encouraged by someone else).
 - Verses 14-15 contrast “the cunning and craftiness of deceitful scheming” with “speaking the truth in love.” Have you ever believed something untrue online? What was the result?
 - How can we develop our “discernment muscles” so that we recognize what’s true and right?
- **Read Ephesians 4:17-24**
 - In verses 17-19, Paul describes the Gentiles as “separated from God...having lost all sensitivity... indulging in impurity [and] full of greed.” How might online content creators use these to draw us toward behaviors and/or purchases that do not honor God?
 - In contrast with the Gentiles, Paul describes the “way of life” we were taught about in Christ in verses 20-24. He encourages us to be “made new in the attitude of our minds.” What are some practical choices that lead to new attitudes? What can help us “put off the old self”?
 - How could “doing something useful with your hands” (verse 28) help you break the habit of too much scrolling on social media?
 - Contrast verses 31-32. Where can you challenge yourself to get rid of bitterness and anger, and replace it with being kind and compassionate? Is this harder in person or online? Why?
- **Read Ephesians 5:1-14**
 - How does understanding our identity as “dearly loved children” create in us the desire to “walk in the way of love”? How might it affect our motivations and choices?
 - Paul shares strong words in verse 3-4 – we should have “not even a hint” of impurity or greed. If you asked those closest to you to review your phone or computer, could this be said of you?
 - What possible influence could our screens wield in determining if we move toward worldliness or holiness? What actions could we take to purposely move toward holiness?
 - What does Paul suggest is a replacement for this type of impure thinking? (verse 4 and again in 20)
- **Read Ephesians 5:15-20**
 - What are some specific ways we can be wise and “make the most of every opportunity” when it comes to digital tools? What practices or guardrails have proven helpful to you?
 - *In verse 18, when Paul says, “be filled with the Spirit,” the verb carries the idea of “continual filling.” This is not simply receiving the Holy Spirit once and for all time when you accept Christ; rather, it is a daily choice we make to stay on a discipleship pathway – to “walk in the way of love.”*
 - How have music, singing, and giving thanks made a difference in your daily walk?
 - How might our digital tools be utilized for music, singing, and giving thanks?
 - In what ways can your screen use be a positive factor for your spiritual life?

Leaning into Obedience: Specific Next Steps

What do these passages teach you about God’s character, and about the life God calls us to? Is there an example to follow or a command to obey? When we remove negative influences, it’s important to also add a positive influence in its place. Each week, we’ll encourage you to “Remove” or change one screen time habit and “Replace” it with a more positive one.

- **Healthy Connections** – This week, choose one family member and/or one local friend to connect with in person and have a conversation about your relationship, this resource, and/or this week’s bible text. During the time you are together, commit to “no screen time” (turn off notifications and/or put your phone out of sight and on silence).
 - *Remove screen time; Replace it with personal connections*

- **Heart Focus** – Set up “focus hours” on your phone – check your settings for Digital Wellness. At the very least, it can track how many minutes (hours) you spend on each app – more advanced apps allow you to turn them off for specific hours of the day. (I use it during work hours, but others might find it more intentionally helpful to limit use during family mealtime, etc.) At the end of the week, assess if you’ve decreased screen hours over last week, and set new goals for continued improvement.
 - *Remove notifications; Replace them with silence*
- **Discernment in Community** – Gather with your family or with your community group and discuss how extreme beliefs can polarize and separate. How will you find common ground in God’s truth? Where do you need to “unfollow” content or groups to seek first God’s kingdom? Pray together and be open to the encouragement and exhortation of those who are in community with you.
 - *Remove extremist or deceitful content; Replace it with conversations in true community*
- **Redeeming the Time** – First thing in the morning, choose to read a passage of scripture before you pick up your phone.⁴ Provide a “parking lot” (charging station) for your devices and set “off” hours for the family (8 p.m. to 8 a.m.). If this location is away from your morning rhythm it will be easier to pick up your Bible first.
 - *Remove morning scrolling; Replace it with morning scripture*

Prayer Prompts:

- Invite members of the group to share personal prayer requests.
- Pray for a renewed mind, that God’s Word would have more influence on your thoughts than any other sources of information. Here’s a prayer adapted from Romans 12:1-2:

God, in view of your mercy, we offer our bodies [eyes, hands, feet, brains] as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to you as a spiritual act of worship. Help us to no longer conform to the patterns of this world, but to instead be continually transformed by the renewing of our minds. Only in this way can we test and approve what your good, pleasing, and perfect will is for our lives. We commit to this through the power of your Holy Spirit, Amen.

Resources:

- For further reading, check out these books:
 - *The Tech-Wise Family*, Andy Crouch
 - *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*, and *Habits of the Household: Practicing the Story of God in Everyday Family Rhythms*, Justin Whitmel Earley
 - *The Wisdom Pyramid: Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World*, Brett McCracken
 - *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, James K. A. Smith
- <https://axis.org/cma-families/> Axis Membership delivers trustworthy, gospel-centered resources on the topics that make parenting such a challenge in this smartphone, social media world. The Christian & Missionary Alliance has made this resource available free to all CCC families.
- For other great online resources, check out www.ccomaha.org/digital

⁴ Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction* (IVP, 2019). This tip is easiest followed by using a print Bible (as opposed to reading scripture on your phone.) 😊