

The Downside and Dangers of the Digital Age

- I. **(PRO 8:12)** I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions.
- A. invention: The thing invented. Something devised; a method of action, etc., contrived by the mind; a device, contrivance, design, plan, scheme.
 - B. Mind that Wisdom does not restrict itself to *developing* witty inventions.
 - 1. This passage speaks of *finding out knowledge of* witty inventions.
 - 2. This is as much an appeal to discernment as it is to engineering.
 - 3. We do well to consider the potential for good or evil in any invention and guard ourselves accordingly.
 - a. Our senses are to be exercised to discern good and evil. **HEB 5:14.**
 - b. Such discernment is not restricted to doctrinal distinctives.
PRO 22:3; NEH 6:1-2.
 - c. **EPH 5:15** calls believers to be *circumspect* (watchful on all sides, attentive to everything, cautious, heedful of all circumstances that may affect action or decision). Don't just look at the "pro" side of inventions.
 - C. Inventions aren't always good things. **ECC 7:29; PSA 106:29, 39; ROM 1:30.**
 - D. "Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end."
(Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, "Economy" 1854)
 - E. "Technology and production can be great benefactors of man, but they are mindless instruments, and if undirected they careen along with a momentum of their own. In our country, they pulverize everything in their path -- the landscape, the natural environment, history and tradition, the amenities and civilities, the privacy and spaciousness of life, much beauty, and the fragile, slow-growing social structures that bind us together." (Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America*, 1970)
- II. Having been "engaged" digitally for about 25 years, your pastor has by experience and study seen particular areas of concern with digital technology.
- A. There is a loss of privacy that we will all come to regret.
 - B. There is the potential for identity theft, fraud, stalking, etc.
 - C. There are very real health issues: physical, psychological and emotional.
 - D. There is high moral risk.
 - E. There are accordingly weighty spiritual implications.
 - F. There are unhealthy sociological implications.
 - G. There is a weighty concern about unhealthy changes in our ability to think and apply information.
 - H. There is a time-wasting factor.
 - I. There is an addiction factor.
 - J. There is a blurring of lines between the virtual and the real.
 - K. There is interference with the way we relate to God.
- III. Consider the dangers our minds face from digital technology.
- A. God has designed our brains to meditate, contemplate and think deeply, especially on His word.
 - B. The scriptures should be our meditation all the day. **PSA 1:1-2; 119:97; JOS 1:8.**
 - 1. meditation: The action, or an act, of meditating; continuous thought or musing upon one subject or series of subjects; serious and sustained reflection or mental

contemplation.

2. meditate: To muse over or reflect upon; to consider, study, ponder. b. To fix one's attention upon; to observe with interest or intentness.
 3. muse: To be absorbed in thought; to meditate continuously in silence; to ponder.
 4. We should meditate IN God's word (**PSA 119:15**) and ON His works.
PSA 143:5.
 5. A pastor is especially supposed to meditate upon the scriptures. **1TI 4:15.**
 6. Question: Do smartphones and tablets facilitate and encourage meditation and continuous thought or distract from it, hinder it or even prohibit it?
 7. Question: How much of our digital time is for business or otherwise necessary and constructive purposes, and how much is for amusement?
 - a. The word *amuse* comes from the Old French *amuse-r*: "to put into a stupid stare; to cause to stare stupidly."
 - b. A subordinate definition of *amuse* means "to divert the attention of the enemy from one's real designs."
- C. In this digital age with all its distractions and sound-bite information, we are losing the ability to meditate and contemplate on God's word (and anything else for that matter).
- D. The following are quotes from *The Digital Invasion* by Dr. Archibald D. Hart and Dr. Sylvia Hart Frejd:
1. "For example, researchers are warning that the ability to 'contemplate' or 'meditate' declines in those who over-engage the digital world."
(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 29)
 2. "...the New York Times reported that the chief technology officer of eBay now sends his children to a nine-classroom school where technology is totally omitted. Yes, you read correctly, 'technology is totally omitted.' But that is not all. So do the employees of Silicon Valley giants like Google, Apple, Yahoo, and Hewlett-Packard. The schools they go to use teaching tools that are anything but high-tech. They use old-fashioned pens and paper and a blackboard with different-colored chalk. Remember these? There's not a computer to be found anywhere. They are not allowed in the classroom, and the school even frowns on their use at home." (Ibid, p. 51)
 3. "Just think about the impact that 'abbreviated texting,' will have on future generations' ability to spell. It is possible that at some time in the future there will be no need for children even to learn spelling, since all gadgets will be voice activated and do the spelling for us. How users spell words will not matter at all. Computers will correct all our errors, just as, or better, than they do now as we write. But is this a healthy outcome? Many do not think so. It is more likely that the brain's basic structure and functioning could be modified to such an extent that it cannot revert to earlier functioning. In other words, once we have lost the art of spelling, we may never be able to retrieve it." (Ibid, p. 60)
 4. "Is it possible that the neglect of some brain mechanisms, due to our overdependence on digital technology, could change our brain to such an extent that it will never function again as it used to? According to scientists like Dr. Small, this could happen." (Ibid)

IV. Our brains need rest just like the muscles need rest.

- A. Rest is very important to physical, mental, and spiritual health.
1. A lack of rest can be due to factors outside the body, problems with the body or

problems inside the mind. **2CO 7:5.**

2. Rest and sleep are gifts from God. **PSA 127:2.**

a. Sleep facilitates healing. **JOH 11:12.**

b. Even Jesus needed sleep (**MAT 8:24-25**) and rest. **JOH 4:6.**

c. Jesus exhorted His disciples to get away from everyone and to take a rest from all the hustle and bustle. **MAR 6:31.**

d. Mental rest is not found in the presence of other people.

3. We need spiritual rest for our souls also.

a. Jesus invites men to come unto Him, not the internet, for this rest. **MAT 11:28-30.**

b. Our rest is found in believing in Christ and ceasing from our own works. **HEB 4:9-11.**

B. In today's digital world, our bodies, and especially our brains, are not getting the rest and idle time they need. This is having detrimental effects on us. The following are quotes from *The Digital Invasion*:

1. "We are only really thinking when our brain is idle. It can't do much thinking when other demands take precedence. Unlike the idling engine of your automobile that is not achieving anything or going anywhere when the car is stopped, an idling brain is hard at work. A brain at rest is a thinking brain." (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 72)

2. "If we allow the external world of digital technology to dominate our brain and not give it any 'internal' time for itself, we will pay the price in reduced productivity and increased human misery." (Ibid)

3. "To be healthy in mind and spirit in our digital go-go-go world, we need to find time for reflection and deliberation. We also need to give the brain adequate recovery time, meaning, of course, more sleep time. Otherwise, we can never truly think thoughts of our own. This is also true for our spiritual lives where contemplation, meditation, and other spiritual practices play a significant role." (Ibid)

4. "If we do not build rest and relaxation into our lives, we will become less effective thinkers and increase our stress and anxiety over the issues that stole our relaxation in the first place. When your brain gets the rest it needs, you learn better and become more creative." (Ibid)

V. *Multitasking* (the concurrent execution of a number of different tasks or jobs, as by interleaving or multiprocessing) is a popular practice today in the business world and in our personal lives which has been greatly enhanced by the digital revolution.

A. God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent but showed by His creation the sense of being a sequential-tasker, not a multitasker.

B. When God created the universe, He didn't leave off creating the sun and stars to start working on the fish, only to be interrupted by His land animal project.

C. He did His projects in order, completing one before starting another. **GEN 1.**

D. God does things with purpose.

1. God saved us according to His purpose.

EPH 1:7-11; ROM 8:28; 9:11; 2TI 1:9.

2. purpose: That which one sets before oneself as a thing to be done or attained; the object which one has in view.

3. In fulfillment of this purpose, Jesus Christ was singularly focused on doing the

- Father's will to save sinful men, not angels. **JOH 6:38-39; HEB 2:16.**
4. The object He had in view was the joy set before Him (**HEB 12:2**), and so "...he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (**LUK 9:51**) for the appointed task at the appointed time, not suffering the distracting objections of His disciples (**MAT 16:21-23**), nor those of His own human nature (**MAT 26:39**), nor the "...contradiction of sinners against himself..." (**HEB 12:3**).
- E. Paul and his fellow ministers were not ones to be wavering in their purpose either. **2CO 1:17-20.**
- F. We are to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus which speaks of being focused. **PHIL 3:14.**
- G. God wants our undivided attention. **1CO 7:35.**
1. distract: To draw in different directions; to draw asunder or apart; to draw away; to separate, divide.
 2. The apostles in the early church came to realize that their multitasking was distracting them from their needful purpose. **ACT 6:1-4.**
 3. The implications of distraction are evident in everyday things such as the increasing call for *distracted driving laws*.
- H. We are warned about those who are *given to change*. **PRO 24:21.**
- I. Martha was prone to multitasking. **LUK 10:38-42.**
1. She was *cumbered about much serving* and was not focused on Jesus. **v. 40.**
 2. cumber: To overwhelm, overthrow, rout, destroy. b. pass. To be overwhelmed and held fast, as in a slough.
 3. Martha was careful and troubled about many things. **v. 41.**
 4. Mary on the other hand was intently listening to Jesus (**v. 39**) focusing on that one thing which was needful. **v. 42.**
- J. Multitasking is thought to increase efficiency, but the opposite is the case. It appears to actually lower performance and intelligence.
1. " 'This steady and undissipated attention to one object, is a sure mark of superior genius; as hurry, bustle, and agitation, are the never-failing symptoms of a weak and frivolous mind.' Doing one thing at a time was, and still is, a mark of true intelligence."
(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 74 [quoting Lord Chesterfield])
 2. "There is overwhelming evidence that multitasking lowers our level of performance. Studies at Harvard and Stanford Universities, using their brightest students, support this finding. Giving them sequential and multitasking projects, they found that ALL the students' performances were reduced about one-third when multitasking. What is also notable about this study is that the students ALL reported at the end that they thought they were actually doing better when multitasking than when sequential tasking." (Ibid, p. 81)
 3. "This same study, conducted by the Institute of Psychiatry in London, found that excessive use of technology also reduces workers' intelligence. Those distracted by incoming email and phone calls suffered a 10 percent decrease in their working IQ." (Ibid, page 82)
- K. A fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth (**PRO 17:24**), but a wise man's eyes are in his head. **ECC 2:14.**
1. A fool's mind is undisciplined, jumping from one thought to another.
 2. When talking to such an one (especially about doctrine), you must rein them in

and make them focus on the topic at hand.

L. Consider again the words Dr. Hart and Dr. Frejd:

1. "Internet overuse is making our students shallow thinkers, as some experts allege." (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 82)
2. "Multitasking robs us of the ability to pay attention. As every parent and teacher knows, paying attention is essential to learning. People who have accomplished great things all have one essential characteristic: they have mastered the art of paying attention." (Ibid, p. 85)
3. "In other words, it is natural for the very young to be distractible. But as a child matures, he or she has to learn how to stay focused and pay attention, and this only happens through disciplined training, not multitasking." (Ibid)
4. "We believe that all this wealth of information is creating a poverty of attention." (Ibid, p. 86)
5. It may be reasonably asked as to whether the digital revolution is contributing to the epidemic of ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and confused, rebellious, dysfunctional children.
6. Trace Embry of Shepherd Hill Academy (a Christ-centered, biblically based residential program and school serving families of troubled teenagers said, "I (Trace) have noticed an incredible difference in the behavior, attitude, and overall mental, emotional, and spiritual health of newly enrolled students over the past decade especially in the last few years. Being born into the digital world, this new generation of young people seems to be hardwired, like robots, with insatiable appetites for things that are killing them from the inside out. When kids come to our program for a year, SHA kids have virtually no access to television, iPods, cell phones, video games, movies, bombastic music, inappropriate entertainment, computers, or any other technological devices requiring screens, keyboards, or electricity. They are reduced to the basics of life. Over the years, we've discovered that when kids first come, their ability to reason, contemplate, and problem solve just isn't there, at least not as it should be for their age group. Many come with little ability to think abstractly or objectively. Most are very narcissistic and lack empathy, while some appear to have no conscience whatsoever. But again, over time their critical, creative, and constructive thinking capacities begin to return to them as they engage in activities, such as construction projects, preparing meals, and other problem-solving tasks that require those parts of the brain to fire again." (Dr. Archibald Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 181)

VI. Man was wired from the beginning with a need for human connection. **GEN 2:18.**

- A. Man was made in God's image (**GEN 1:26**) and He is God in Three Persons. **1JO 5:7.**
- B. The church is built of mutually supporting members. **1CO 12:21.**
- C. This new digital world with its social networking, emails, and texts boasts itself a utopia for human connection.
 1. We can now connect with long-lost relatives, friends, co-workers, and classmates from around the country or world.
 2. People commonly have hundreds of "friends" on Facebook or LinkedIn.
 3. But has all this digital connection actually improved our relationships and our fullness as individuals?
- D. Scripture emphasizes the importance of face-to-face interaction.

1. When the apostle John could have continued his letter to the elect lady and written many more things which he had to say, he decided to wait and speak to them face to face. **2JO 1:12.**
 - a. His reason for doing so?: "...that our joy may be full."
 - b. John likewise had many more things to say to Gaius, but rather waited in order to tell him face to face. **3JO 1:13-14.**
 - c. Though far more personal than email, texts, or Facebook, even hand-written letters are inferior to face-to-face communication.
2. Jesus' disciples had sorrow when they were told they would not see Him anymore but when they would see him again, their hearts would rejoice. **JOH 16:17, 22.**
3. While writing Timothy a letter, Paul told him that he greatly desired to see him *that he might be filled with joy.* **2TI 1:4.**
4. Paul, writing to the Romans, said he longed to see them so that he could be *comforted together with them.* **ROM 1:11-12.**
5. The elders at Ephesus wept sore and sorrowed that they would see Paul's face no more. **ACT 20:37-38.**
6. We should all long to be with Jesus and see His face. **1JO 3:2; REV 22:3-4.**
- C. It's especially important for church members to see each other often.
 1. It was said of those who feared the LORD that they *spake often one to another.* **MAL 3:16.**
 2. This meant face-to-face communication.
 3. This is one reason why it's important for all church members, both resident and non-resident, to be in attendance as often as they can.
 4. Christians are to be our preferred companions. **PSA 119:63.**
 - a. companion: One who associates with or accompanies another; a mate; a fellow.
 - b. associate: To join (persons, or one person with (to arch.) another), in (to obs.) common purpose, action, or condition; to link together, unite, combine, ally, confederate.
 - c. accompany: To accompany (a person or thing) to (another): to add as companion; to associate; to add or conjoin to.
 - d. When one is a companion with another they are *joined together.*
- D. Consider the following observations from *The Digital Invasion* regarding the drawbacks and dangers of digital connections:
 1. "Digital contacts can never compensate for real face-to-face human contact with those you love. The concern is this detachment's impact on how parents attach to children and in turn affect the attachment style they will develop. We are designed for real-life attachments where we are seen, valued, and heard. It is in our closest relationships that we experience this. If our brain system becomes more attached to digital gadgets and detached from people, our relational skills will atrophy. We are already seeing evidence of this." (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 70)
 2. "Research shows that human connection is one of the keys to happiness. Connections are what make us human and are the core of how we express our humanity." (Ibid, p. 92)
 3. "Unfortunately, the digital social media that now dominates our lives tends to foster more self-centeredness than deeper connections." (Ibid, p. 93)

4. “A good rule of thumb for yourself, and to teach to your children, is to use the digital world to relay necessary information, but communicate deeper thoughts and emotions in direct face-to-face encounters. This is essential in today's digital world for laying the foundation of healthy connections and relationships.” (Ibid, pp. 96-97)
5. “Media has put us close to the people who are far away but has separated us from the ones who are nearby.” (Ibid, p. 162)
6. “As one expert puts it: 'Tech savvy our children are; life savvy they are not.' Children who socialize mainly via social media do not grasp the finer points of social interaction; they need human contact, coaching, and modeling.” (Ibid, p. 174)
7. “Current research also reveals that digital natives who spend most of their time in a virtual world will more likely be lonely.” (Ibid, p. 99)
- E. Other research has shown that excess digital connectedness induces depression.
 1. “Scientists have confirmed that Facebook can make you miserable. A study comparing how young adults felt at different times of the day with their Facebook use showed that the more they logged onto the social networking site, the less happy they were. The more the participants had other forms of contact with people, such as face to face or over the phone, they tended to feel better over time....'On the surface, Facebook provides an invaluable resource for fulfilling the basic human need for social connection,' said Ethan Kross, a social psychologist who led the work at the University of Michigan. 'But rather than enhance well-being, we found that Facebook use predicts the opposite result—it undermines it.’” (Richard Gray, Science Correspondent for The Telegraph, art. *Facebook Can Make You Miserable*)
 2. Contributing factors to the loneliness and depression are things like the *celebrity mentality* and the trap of *measuring oneself by others'* opinions or their perceived superiority.
- F. Here are some tips for overcoming loneliness and making real connections and friendships.
 1. If you want a friend, be friendly. **PRO 18:24.**
 2. Be upbeat and positive. You have a secure salvation, a certain future, a living hope, a conquered foe, a living Savior and High Priest, forgiveness of sins, the promises of the gospel, faith, and a sovereign God Who loves you, watches over you, limits the wicked and causes you to triumph in Christ. People are drawn more to the optimist than the pessimist and a Christian has more reason than anybody else to be optimistic.
 3. People should know that you care about them. It is generally true that folks won't care about how much you know unless they know how much you care. Kindness is rarely penalized in this world.
 4. Avoid self-promoting boasting, not only because it is a pride issue, but because few things repel acquaintances as quickly. NOTE: Glorifying in Christ is not self-promoting boasting. **GAL 6:14.**
 5. Skip the B.S. (Bogus Story-telling). People spot phonies and avoid them.
 6. Be genuine, not an imitation of somebody you emulate, nor a chameleon who edits himself to fit in.
 7. Be a good listener, “...swift to hear...” (**JAM 1:19**).
 8. Frequent the same places at the same times. This will help you to see the same

- people regularly which will help to naturally establish connections.
9. Try to at least say “hi” to people in your proximity.
 10. Look up. Stop looking at your phone in public. You might just be missing opportunities to have real conversations.

VII. The digital revolution has facilitated an epidemic of narcissism.

- A. narcissism: Self-love and admiration that find emotional satisfaction in self-contemplation.
 1. The first characteristic of the perilous times of the last days is that “...men shall be lovers of their own selves...” (**2TI 3:2**).
 2. This is NOT the love of self that is the basis of the royal law. **JAM 2:8**.
- B. “Selfie” was awarded *word of the year* in 2013 by Oxford Dictionary.
- C. Social networking is a tailor-made platform for narcissism, and especially so, having developed on the heels of a generation steeped in the perilous psychology of *self-esteem* (favourable appreciation or opinion of oneself).
- D. “This journalist's experience also highlights one of the major drawbacks of our overuse of social media, namely, that it fosters the growth of narcissism, which is now seen as epidemic in our young people....Narcissists are preoccupied with themselves and are obsessed with what others think of them. They also believe that they are entitled to the attention of everyone else....Narcissists are not particularly interested in, or good at offering, warmth and caring in their social interactions. They can enjoy being around people and can be most charming, flattering, and likable. But it is all for their own benefit.” (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 93)
- F. “If you are talented and narcissistic you might be able to attract a posse to follow you or an attractive 'trophy' partner. Online this might take the form of followers or friends---research has found that grandiose narcissism predicts the number of Twitter followers, Klout score and Facebook friends a person has.”
(Dr. W. Keith Campbell, art. *Are We More Narcissistic Than Ever Before?*, The Independent, Aug. 28, 2014)
- G. One can easily see how Facebook is a narcissist's dream.
 1. They get to be a star, at least in their own eyes.
 2. They post all the best pictures of themselves.
 3. They post updates about their every move, as if people actually care what they are doing.
 4. They get to promote a false image of themselves which is much more interesting than the real person.
 5. This has all become fashionable for adults and children but children are especially at risk as they are in the formative stage of emotional development and this self-love can set them up for premature destruction through pride.
PRO 16:18.
 - a. “Dr. Jessemy Hibbard, a chartered clinical psychologist, said, 'Images are a way for young people to seek approval and attention from their peers. However they can also lead to cyber bullying and issues with self confidence. The majority of teens post the photos in search of assurance and compliments, but they are making themselves vulnerable to negative comments and abuse. It's all about comparison and young people are using social media to measure themselves against others. If a teenager posts a picture and it doesn't get any 'likes' or if it is their birthday and

they don't receive a certain number of posts, they see that as an embarrassment. It is seen as an indication that they are not popular. There is an expectation now amongst young people that they should get comments on all of their posts and images....Social media sites have come under scrutiny recently following the suicide of 14 year-old Hannah Smith after she was targeted by trolls on the social networking site Ask.fm.” (Rosa Silverman et. al., The Telegraph, art. *Selfie Photographs Trend Puts Children at Risk of Abuse*)

- b. It doesn't help when parents are always telling their children how pretty, smart, or talented they are.

G. Narcissism is just another word for *pride*.

1. pride: A high or overweening opinion of one's own qualities, attainments, or estate, which gives rise to a feeling and attitude of superiority over and contempt for others; inordinate self-esteem.
2. Pride was Satan's downfall; he was the first narcissist. **1TI 3:6 c/w EZE 28:17.**
3. Pride is sin. **MAR 7:22.**
4. Pride comes not from God (**IJO 3:16**); God hates pride. **PRO 8:13; 16:5.**
5. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. **JAM 4:6.**
 - a. humble: adj. Having a low estimate of one's importance, worthiness, or merits; marked by the absence of self-assertion or self-exaltation; lowly: the opposite of proud.
 - b. Humility, not pride, is the key to success. **JAM 4:10; PRO 18:12; 22:4.**
6. Even huge tech companies like Google recognize this. World Net Daily interviewed Google Senior Vice President of Operations Laszlo Bock and found the following:
 - a. “Bock cites a common error in 'successful' people without intellectual humility: 'They, instead, commit the fundamental attribution error, which is if something good happens, it's because I'm a genius. If something bad happens, it's because someone's an idiot or I didn't get the resources or the market moved. ... What we've seen is that the people who are the most successful here, who we want to hire, will have a fierce position. They'll argue like hell. They'll be zealots about their point of view. But then you say, 'here's a new fact,' and they'll go, 'Oh, well, that changes things; you're right.'”
(Bob Unruh, *Google: GPAs, Test Scores 'Worthless'*, World Net Daily, 2/24/2014)
 - b. “Without humility, you are unable to learn,' he said.” (Ibid)

H. What one talks about tells you much about him.

1. “...of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh” (**LUK 6:45**).
2. Your heart is where your treasure is. **MAT 6:21.**
3. If one is posting voluminously about himself on Facebook, including how wonderful his family is, how great his job is, how nice of things he has, the great vacation he went on, and how interesting of a person he is; what does that tell you about what he thinks about the most? The answer: himself.
4. It's a fool who is only interested in himself. **PRO 18:2.**

I. It is very easy to fall into pride.

1. Even things that seem innocent might not be if they are done for the wrong reason.

2. This could be making posts about your children, your job promotions, pictures of yourself, your house, car, etc.
- J. There is a need for introspection.
 1. Before you post anything on a social networking site, ask yourself why you are posting it.
 2. If you are posting it to make yourself look good or to impress others, don't post it.
- K. Remember what Scripture teaches against seeking the praise of men, especially if you are measuring your worth by others' opinions.
 1. First, it is not good to have a heavy dietary need for other's praise. **PRO 25:27.**
 2. It is unwise to measure ourselves amongst and by ourselves. **2CO 10:12.**
 3. Paul deemed the opinion of men about himself to be of much less importance than God's opinion of him. **1CO 4:3-4.**
 4. Looking for approval? Remember:
 - a. **(PRO 27:2)** Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.
 - b. **(2CO 10:18)** For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.
 5. If others don't praise you (per **PRO 27:2**), don't sweat it. If your works are good works, who cares if nobody but God takes notice of them? His "likes" are the best and bring the only true satisfaction and peace to the soul. **ISA 49:4; 1JO 3:21.**
 6. We are to love the praise of God more than the praise of men. **JOH 12:43; 5:44; ROM 2:29.**
 7. We are particularly warned against being liked by an unbelieving world that we should rather hope would "unfriend" us. **LUK 6:26; JOH 15:19; JAM 4:4.**
 8. People that live for the recognition and praise of other men set themselves up for traps. **PRO 29:5.**

VIII. The digital revolution has provided an easy platform to say, share, and gossip too much online.

- A. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are venues where one can from the "secure island" of his computer blab things he should not and would not normally have the opportunity to in real life.
- B. The definition of *twitter* is telling.
 1. twitter: Of a bird: To utter a succession of light tremulous notes; to chirp continuously with a tremulous effect. b. transf. Of a person: To sing after the above manner; also (esp. of a woman), to talk or chatter rapidly in a small or tremulous voice.
 2. tremulous: Characterized or affected by trembling or quivering from nervous agitation or weakness, of mental or physical origin; hence, fearful, timorous.
 3. Is a need to constantly send out snippets of non-essential information a sign of personal strength or weakness?
 4. **(PRO 10:8)** The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall.
 5. prate: To talk, to chatter: usually dyslogistic, implying speaking much or long to little purpose; formerly also to speak insolently, boastfully, or officiously; to tell tales, blab.
 6. A prating fool is likely to set himself up for trouble. When things are written

- online they can't be taken back and can be saved forever.
- C. As Christians, we should keep the door of our lips. **PSA 141:3; 39:1.**
1. We should be slow to speak. **JAM 1:19.**
 2. We should be slow to post and slow to tweet, too.
- D. When you keep your tongue, you keep yourself from trouble. **PRO 21:23.**
1. Speech may be oral or written. David said, "...my tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (**PSA 45:1**).
 2. Your mouth can cause your flesh to sin. **ECC 5:6.**
 3. The longer you keep yapping, the more likely it is for you to slip into sin. **PRO 10:19.**
 4. It's the fool who says everything that's on his mind. **PRO 29:11.**
 5. A fool's lips will swallow up himself. **ECC 10:11-13.**
 - a. babbler: A foolish or idle talker, chatterer, prater.
 - b. A rational adult given to babbling is no better than the drunkard (**PRO 23:29**), obviously under the influence of the wrong spirit.
 6. An unbridled tongue (in person or online) makes a Christian's religion vain. **JAM 1:26.**
 7. "We are masters of the unsaid words, but slaves of those we let slip out." (Winston Churchill)
 8. "Be careful in speaking. There is always time to add a word, never to withdraw one." (Balthasar Gracián)
 9. Think before you speak. **PRO 29:20.**
 10. We will give an account to God for every idle word spoken. **MAT 12:36.**
- E. Wise men spare their words. **PRO 17:27-28; JOB 13:5.**
1. "Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something." (Plato)
 2. "They never taste who always drink; They always talk who never think." (Matthew Prior)
 3. "They that know the least know it the loudest." (Fred Hodgins)
 4. (**ECC 5:3**) For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.
 5. (**PRO 17:28**) Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.
 - a. Mind that refraining from speech is a *holding of one's peace*. Much peace is lost through unrestrained speech.
 - b. This verse is good counsel for all who struggle with insecurities about their lack of knowledge or understanding which detracts from the image they would like to have in the eyes of others.
 6. As pastor, my desire for all who are heavy into social networking was well stated by Job: "O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom" (**JOB 13:5**)
 7. We have not only the right but often the duty to remain silent.
- F. Facebook and Twitter facilitate *busybodyness* (the condition of being meddlesome and improperly busy in in other people's affairs).
1. Paul instructed young widows to remarry, bear children, and guide the house, in part because of their propensity to be *tattlers* and *busybodies*. **1TI 5:11-14.**
 2. Facebook has now made it possible for young women in general, and too often young mothers at home with their children, to digitally wander about from house

- to house being busybodies and speaking things which they ought not.
- 3. Being a busybody is no trivial matter. **1PE 4:15.**
- 4. Much strife has come as a result of posting unnecessary things online.

IX. Another issue is the tendency to compare ourselves via social networking.

- A. “It used to be that all we had to worry about was keeping up with the 'Joneses' next door. Now with Facebook, Twitter, and the like, we have thousands of 'Joneses' to keep up with. And none of us is immune to the posts and tweets that leave us comparing and contrasting our lives with others.” (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 100)
- B. “Fear is very much part of the climate of Facebook. When we are afraid of what people think of us, we work hard to craft just the right image, composed of just the right pictures, personal information and status updates. The emphasis is on being clever, not on being genuine.” (Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook*, page 197).
- C. Comparing ourselves among ourselves is not wise. **2CO 10:12.**
- D. Paul, our example (**1CO 11:1**), did not commend himself, nor did he need others to commend him. **2CO 3:1.**
- E. Remember, it's a very small thing to be judged of others. **1CO 4:3-4.**
- F. If you fret about what everyone thinks of you, you have not yet grown up.
 - 1. It has been said that when you're 18, you care about what *everybody* thinks about you, when you're 40 you don't care about what *anybody* thinks of you, and when you're 60 you realize that *nobody* thinks about you.
 - 2. God thinks of you and that's all that matters. **ISA 49:16.**
- G. People tend to make their lives look like a fairy tale on Facebook.
 - 1. They appear to have the perfect life, the perfect marriage, perfect kids, perfect job, perfect social life, etc.
 - a. The prophets and apostles under Divine inspiration wrote not only about their strengths and virtues but also about their weaknesses and failings.
 - b. Their Faithbook profiles were realistic and honest.
 - 2. When you compare your *real* life to another's edited *virtual* life, you appear to fall short.
 - 3. They probably don't have it together like their Facebook page portrays, and you are trying in your heart to imitate a phony life.
 - 4. Even if they do have it together and have the “perfect” life, you should still not compare yourself with them.
 - 5. The only standard you should try to measure up to is God's standard found in the scripture. A good place to start is **MIC 6:8.**
- H. Don't be covetous of what others have; be content with what you have. **HEB 13:5.**
- I. Don't worry about what God has given to others. **JOH 21:20-22.**
- J. Our completeness is in Christ and we should not seek it anywhere else. **COL 2:10.**

X. The digital age has enabled anyone with online access to be a *celebrity* (the condition of being much extolled or talked about; famousness, notoriety).

- A. Media in general is awash with the cult of celebrity.
- B. Consider some of the current benchmarks for entertainment like American Idol, Dancing With The Stars, reality shows, etc. What is the driving force behind the desire for celebrity?
 - 1. “The short answer is ego. Insatiable ego....The desire to become a star requires an incredible appetite for attention and approval.”

(Breitbart and Ebner, *Hollywood Interrupted*)

2. Biblically, this is the *pride of life* (**1JO 2:16**) which expresses itself through *vanity* (self-conceit and desire for admiration), against which we must fight. **EPH 4:17-18.**
 3. This inordinate desire for drawing attention to oneself in competition with others of the same mindset is a factor in the increasing display of flesh and of outrageous behavior.
 4. But for all of the “glory” of celebrity, the celebrity world is not uncommonly characterized by a dissatisfied existence and emotional distress unto self-destruction.
 5. “The problem is, living off approval and applause, and deriving your sense of self-worth from the praise of others, may feel great, but it also produces great problems. When it comes to being worshipped, human beings just don’t make very good gods, something the Good Book warns about repeatedly. Worship is meant for God alone. But when humans are idolized and worshipped – and when they lower themselves to accept that homage and bask in its glory – major conflict mysteriously appears within the idolized 'star.’”
(David Kupelian, *The Secret Curse of Hollywood Stars*)
- B. The internet has made the cult of celebrity the stuff of the everyday person.
1. Virtually anyone can have their own website or YouTube channel.
 2. Everyone can be a star and be the center of attention and admiration!
 3. But if everyone is a star, the distinction of stardom vanishes.
 4. As one de-motivational poster puts it, “Remember, you are unique---just like everyone else.”
 5. This clamor for celebrity generates increased self-promotion to stay ahead of the crowd and/or a feeling of rejection, insignificance and depression.

XI. Another problem facilitated by the digital age is cyber-stalking, a danger for adults but especially for children.

- A. Stalking has been made easier with the Internet with the unwanted surveillance and anonymity it affords.
- B. Here are a few practical tips to avoid being cyber-stalked.
1. Make sure that the location services are disabled for photos on your smartphone.
 - a. If location services is enabled for photos, then each picture you take is digitally stamped with the GPS coordinates of where it was taken.
 - b. Someone with a simple Internet browser add-on can easily find the exact location of your home, school, vacation spot, etc.
 2. Think twice about posting your location and whereabouts on Facebook. You are not only telling the world where you are but where you are not (at your home) and this may be risky for your property or anyone who happens to be there.
 3. If you allow your children to be online, teach them to NEVER meet someone in person who they have only met online.
 4. I personally know of a woman who thought she was being courted online by someone with an amazing profile of success and family-oriented values but the guy turned out to have built a completely false profile to ensnare an unwary soul.
- C. A tangent to cyber-stalking is cyber-bullying.
1. “Unlike physical bullying, where a stronger, more overpowering child usually

tries to dominate or punish a weaker child, cyberbullying can be done by a weaker person, hiding behind the safety of a computer and the Internet....digital bullies can remain virtually anonymous....This frees a child from normative and social constraints.” (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 122)

2. If your children are being cyber-stalked or cyber-bullied, then get them off the internet or the specific parts of it in which the problem is taking place.

XII. Having recently addressed the pornography problem in general and the clear dangers that the internet represents in that regard, including sexting, I choose here to limit my comments to the matter of cyber-sex and cyber-affairs.

- A. As a pastor, I have already seen the destruction of one marriage as a result of online behavior, and this was over ten years ago before the onset of today's mobile devices.
- B. “A recent study shows as many as one in five divorces now involve Facebook affairs.” (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 103)
- C. It has never been easier for married people to have “affairs” (that's a euphemism for adultery) than it is today via the Internet.
 1. Scripture warns us to stay away from strange women and “...come not nigh the door of her house” (**PRO 5:8**).
 2. It is now much easier to digitally “come *through* the door of her house” without being seen by other people.
- D. Adultery can be committed via the Internet without physically committing the act.
 1. Jesus taught that adultery can be committed in one's heart by looking upon a woman to lust after her. **MAT 5:28 c/w PRO 6:25**.
 2. Job knew that the covenant that he made with his eyes forbade him to *think upon* another woman. **JOB 31:1**.
 3. *Eyes* can be full of adultery. **2PE 2:14**.
 4. The thought of foolishness is sin. **PRO 24:9**.
- E. If you are found out to have been having an online “affair,” you will be excluded from the church for adultery. **1CO 6:9-10**.
- F. If you have been having an online “affair” and are not yet found out, you will not escape the scrutiny, exposure or judgment of God except through prompt repentance. **NUM 32:23; 1CO 4:5; HEB 4:12-13**.
- G. This kind of thing needs to be avoided at all costs. **PRO 4:14-15**.
- H. If you play with fire, you WILL get burned. **PRO 6:25-32**.
- I. Heed the warning. **PRO 7:24-27**.

XIII. Digital technology is highly addictive.

- A. There are some obvious factors in play that facilitate rapid and deep addiction:
 1. *Instant gratification*. Virtually no labor or patience is involved.
 2. *Control*. It is predominantly a one-sided relationship where the individual controls the content and satisfaction level.
 3. *Pleasure*. It amuses, stimulates, distracts, excites and provides escape.
- B. “We came across a blog recently, where a man was explaining his relationship to his digital world: 'In real life people make demands of me. It takes energy to connect and talk and work through conflict and resolve issues. My smartphone makes no such demands on me. It offers pleasure 24/7. My brain craves the instant gratification and pleasures the text or email offers. The more I look at it and use it the more dependent I become on it.'” (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 39)

- C. Internet use, like many other activities or substances, can be addictive if overused.
1. If you can't stop doing a certain habitual thing (surfing the internet, video gaming, TV, shopping, playing a sport, gambling, etc.) or using a non-essential substance compulsively (alcohol, cigarettes, coffee, etc.), you are addicted to that activity or substance.
 2. addiction: Rom. Law. A formal giving over or delivery by sentence of court. Hence, A surrender, or dedication, of any one to a master.
 3. To be addicted to anything is to allow it to have power over you.
 - a. We are not to be brought under the power of anything, even lawful things. **1CO 6:12.**
 - b. We must keep under our body and bring it into subjection, including our brain which is prone to get addicted to dopamine, and not let it control us **1CO 9:27.**
 - c. Sin must not be allowed to *reign* (to have power, sway, or predominance; to prevail or be prevalent) in our bodies. **ROM 6:12.**
 - d. We must not *yield* (to hand over, give up, relinquish possession of, surrender, resign) our body to sin and let it have *dominion* (the power or right of governing and controlling; sovereign authority; lordship, sovereignty; rule, sway; control, influence) over us. **ROM 6:13-14.**
 4. Addiction is a form of what the scripture calls *inordinate affection*. **COL 3:5.**
 - a. inordinate: Not 'ordered'; devoid of order or regularity; deviating from right or rule; irregular, disorderly; not regulated, controlled, or restrained.
 - b. affection: Of the mind: An affecting or moving of the mind in any way; a mental state brought about by any influence; an emotion or feeling.
 - c. According to the definitions, an inordinate affection is a moving of the mind or a mental state brought about by an unregulated, uncontrolled, or unrestrained influence.
 - d. If a habit or a substance has an influence on your mind that you are not able to restrain or control (in other words, you have an addiction to it), you have an inordinate affection for that habit or substance.
 - e. Inordinate affection is a sin which we are to mortify. **COL 3:5.**
 - f. This means that we should mortify addictions in our lives, particularly non-essential voluntary habits or substances for the sake of pleasure, since we are expressly warned against being "...given to pleasures" (**ISA 47:8**).
- D. There are a few addictions the scripture allows and encourages.
1. A pastor and church members must be *given to hospitality*. **1TI 3:2; ROM 12:13.**
 2. The house of Stephanas was *addicted to ministering to the saints*. **1CO 16:15.**
 3. The churches of Macedonia *gave themselves* to the Lord and to the brethren. **2CO 8:5.**
- E. Unbiblical addictions, including internet addictions, should be resisted and fled.
- F. The following are some quotes from *The Digital Invasion* concerning Internet addiction:
1. "The article goes on to say that the brains of Internet addicts scan a lot like the brains of drug and alcohol addicts. Our digital gadgets acts [sic] like electronic cocaine to the brain." (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, page 134)
 2. "A national study conducted by a team from Stanford University's School of Medicine estimates that nearly one in eight Americans suffer from at least one

sign of problematic Internet use; many think it is higher than this.”

(Ibid, page 137)

3. “Just like many other things in life where excess is not best, overdosing the pleasure system can have very detrimental consequences....overloading the pleasure system gradually raises the bar so that you have to increase the level of stimulation to maintain the pleasure. This phenomenon is called the *addictive process*....Many of our Internet behaviors, such as gambling or gaming on the Internet, or even Facebooking, can do as much damage to the pleasure center as any powerful drug. The pleasure center can become so flooded that only the 'big' stimulants can get a message to the pleasure center. Little, ordinary pleasures are ignored because they do not have the power to overcome the flooding. This loss of ability to experience ordinary pleasure is called *anhedonia*, and it can create serious emotional disorders. In fact, anhedonia is one of the main symptoms of major depression.”

(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, pp. 62-63)

4. “Social psychologists have come to believe that such an addiction is possible and call it 'FAD,' or 'Facebook Addiction Disorder.' They say it is a condition that is defined by long hours spent on Facebook---so much time that the healthy balance of the individual's life is affected. It is estimated that approximately 350 million people are now suffering from this disorder. According to Psychology Today, Facebook and Twitter are more addictive than tobacco and alcohol.”

(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, pp. 102-103)

- G. “Internet addictions share many of the characteristics of other addictions. These are the main features of all addictions:

- Addictions remove us from our true feelings, providing a form of escape from the unpleasant aspects of life. In many cases, one uses the Internet excessively in order to cope with social situations that are out of control. For instance, a husband who is unhappy with his marriage could swamp his life with Internet activities. Similarly, someone who is not performing well at work could find an escape in the digital world.
- Addictive behavior takes control of the addict to the extent that it exceeds all logic or reason. The true addict has feelings but may not acknowledge them.
- Addictions take the pleasure system of the brain captive. Only the addiction provides pleasure, but robs the center of other pleasures.
- The addiction takes priority over all other life issues. All addicts develop an obsession over their addictive behavior and think only of the moment they can get back to their addiction.
- Addicts always deny that their addiction is out of control and cannot see anything bad in their behavior.
- All addictions are, in a sense, also substance addictions, when you consider that the body becomes "hooked" on the underlying biochemical changes.”

(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, pages 137-138)

- H. “Research has shown the most effective treatment plan for overcoming digital addiction is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. This treatment is based on the premise that thoughts determine feelings. This model helps explain how negative self-thoughts can fuel the compulsive behavior associated with the digital addiction. The most common negative emotions present in those with digital addictions are depression and anxiety. The other

emotions digital addicts feel are being tense, lonely, restless, withdrawn, angry, or useless. In treating digital addictions, the goal is to abstain from the application you are most addicted to while using the other needed digital applications moderately.” (Ibid, p. 144)

- I. Addiction to the internet and digital technology is affecting troubled teens in worse ways than in years past.
 - 1. The following is a quote from Trace Embry, the founder and executive director of Shepherd's Hill Academy (SHA), a Christ-centered and biblically based residential program and school that serves families of troubled teenagers between the ages of twelve and seventeen.
 - 2. “I (Trace) have noticed an incredible difference in the behavior, attitude, and overall mental, emotional, and spiritual health of newly enrolled students over the past decade especially in the last few years. Being born into the digital world, this new generation of young people seems to be hardwired, like robots, with insatiable appetites for things that are killing them from the inside out. When kids come to our program for a year, SHA kids have virtually no access to television, iPods, cell phones, video games, movies, bombastic music, inappropriate entertainment, computers, or any other technological devices requiring screens, keyboards, or electricity. They are reduced to the basics of life. Over the years, we've discovered that when kids first come, their ability to reason, contemplate, and problem solve just isn't there, at least not as it should be for their age group. Many come with little ability to think abstractly or objectively. Most are very narcissistic and lack empathy, while some appear to have no conscience whatsoever. But again, over time their critical, creative, and constructive thinking capacities begin to return to them as they engage in activities, such as construction projects, preparing meals, and other problem-solving tasks that require those parts of the brain to fire again.” (Ibid, page 181)
- J. Dr. Hart's review of the 2011 Barna Family and Technology Report noted, “Very few adults or youth take substantial breaks from technology. This confirms that Americans are increasingly becoming dependent, if not addicted, to technology. Only 10 percent of parents and 6 percent of teenagers say they try to take one day a week off from their digital usage. The question that arises is whether families are in control of their technology or being controlled by it.” (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 40)
- K. If you are struggling with digital addiction (or any type of addiction) you should seek counsel from your pastor and possibly from professional addiction counselors as well.
 - 1. If your children have a digital addiction, you need to take as much as needed away from them to break the addiction.
 - 2. It will not make your children happy with you, but it is your job as a parent to stop their destructive behaviors.
 - 3. “Effective planning and boundary setting in today's digital world communicates caring. It says, 'I cannot allow you to get into trouble. I love you too much for that. I want you to be the best person you can possibly be. So you have to trust me; my judgment is better than yours and my love for you demands that I say no when I must. Yes, you probably don't understand and almost certainly want to shout out 'you don't love me,' but one day you will be a parent yourself and will understand....Children do not always see it this way. How can they? They are too immature to understand, but the day will come when they will appreciate it,

especially when they become parents! So, say no appropriately, consistently, and lovingly, and your children will one day bless you for it....Deep down children do not want spineless parents.”

(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 172)

4. “Try to monitor your child's texting without being too invasive in older teens. Talking regularly with your children and building a strong, open relationship is always the best protection.”
(Ibid, p. 174)
 5. “The most effective protection a parent can offer a child is to be intimately involved in their lives, both inside and outside the home.” (Ibid, p. 180)
 6. “My experience has convinced me that, deep inside, kids really want their parents to put limits, not just on their techno use, but many other areas of their lives also.” (Ibid, p. 182)
 7. Parents should set the example of digital restraint for children. Children will have a hard time accepting for themselves what their mom or dad are obviously not willing to do.
- L. Video games are highly addictive and some have serious consequences.
1. Dr. Hart in *The Digital Invasion* had this to say about video game playing and addiction: “As we write this book, it is estimated that 95 to 97 percent of our youth are playing video games of one sort or another.”
(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 124)
 2. “Video game addiction, also known as video game overuse is the extreme use of video games to the extent that it interferes with daily life. Gaming addiction is a form of impulse control disorder. People with this impulse control disorder can't resist the urge to engage in behaviors that harm themselves or others and are disposed toward developing other addictions such as alcohol, drugs, eating disorders, and compulsive gambling. The impulse to play these games is overwhelming. Teens are the most vulnerable to gaming addictions, and their need to play can be obsessive to the extent it is harmful to themselves or to others.” (Ibid)
 3. “What causes gaming addiction? Again, the pleasure and reward system of the brain plays a major role in delivering extreme euphoria while gaming. This also explains why it is so addicting. Gaming provides a make-believe world for the gamer, providing an escape from the real world. In the case of a gamer in China who committed suicide, the head of one software association was quoted saying: 'In the hypothetical world created by such games, they become confident and gain satisfaction, which they cannot get in the real world.’” (Ibid)
 4. “Kevin Roberts, a nationally recognized expert on video gaming addiction...offers the following risk ratings for major games. The risk goes from 1-10, 10 being the severest....
....
- First Person Shooter Games: Counter-Strike, Halo, and Call of Duty - Addiction Risk 7
- Real Time Strategy Games: Command & Conquer, Age of Empires, Empire Earth - Addiction Risk 7
- The Narcotics of the Game World - MMORPGs (Massively Multiple Online Role-Playing): RuneScape - Addiction Risk 7, World of Warcraft - Addiction Risk 10” (Ibid, p. 126)

- a. With the pervasiveness of video games, especially first person shooter and war games, is it any wonder why it is now far easier than in previous generations for a soldier to kill an enemy in battle since he has been doing it virtually since he was a child?
 - b. The military uses video games to train soldiers. According to an insightful article published in the online version of *The Atlantic*, the military sponsored the first video game's development through MIT, and essentially the benefits of preconditioned warriors have been reaped for military purposes ever since. (*Playing War: How the Military Uses Video Games*, Hamza Shaban, Oct. 10, 2013) URL: <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2013/10/playing-war-how-the-military-uses-video-games/280486/>
 - c. With each new war, it has been statistically shown that higher percentages of soldiers will actually kill an enemy soldier.
 - d. Could this be a factor in the dramatic increase in PTSD and suicide among soldiers in or returning from modern wars?
 - e. Could these type of video games elicit *wicked imaginations* which God hates? **PRO 6:18.**
 - f. Could these type of video games elicit a *love of violence*, which puts one in the cross-hairs of God's hatred? **PSA 11:5.**
5. Video gaming might not be a sin, but is it wise?
- M. Consider taking a digital fast.
1. Fasting is Biblical and we should be doing it from time to time. **MAT 6:16-18.**
 2. A digital fast where we keep all non-essential digital devices turned off for a day would do us all good.
 3. It will also indicate to you whether you are addicted to technology.
 4. "The fact is that anything we can't fast from owns us."
(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 161)
 5. Be doers of the word, not simply hearers of it. **JAM 1:22.**

XIV. Our digital technology gets between us and God.

- A. "Some pastors excuse smartphones, believing that church members may be using a Bible app to follow the sermon. More likely, members, especially the younger members, are playing games or texting others. One pastor shared with us that some of his members even criticized his sermons while he was preaching, by texting other church members or someone at home during the service. How disconcerting! Another pastor told us that he is seriously considering leaving the ministry because of these distractions." (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 71)
- B. Heretofore I have permitted adults to use these devices during the church service. I have come to a decision that this practice must stop.
1. My research and personal experience have convinced me that these innovations have not increased our attention to, nor knowledge of God's word.
 2. Likewise, my research and personal experience have convinced me that these innovations are a distraction or at least a potential distraction and our goal ought to be, in our worship if nowhere else, to "...attend upon the Lord without distraction" (**1CO 7:35**).
 3. I am also persuaded that there is no substitute for a printed Bible and an increased reliance upon digital devices is reducing our proficiency in the Holy

- Scriptures. I guarantee that you cannot remember the place or wording of a particular text of Scripture on a digital device like you can with a printed Bible.
4. Therefore, starting immediately, there will be no smartphones, tablets, etc. used during service for Bibles, outlines, or anything else.
 5. With the exception of emergency or “on call need” purposes (or such like), phones, etc. need to be turned off or put in *airplane mode* and put away out of sight during church.
 6. Bring your paper Bible and feel free to make marks or notations therein and/or write down notes on separate paper.
 7. I am neither requiring nor asking you to abandon your digital devices in other settings but only while we are assembled together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for worship. This is our time with God and His written word.
- C. We need to be protective of our “Godspace.”
1. God should be supreme in our lives. We are to love God with our entire being: our heart, soul, mind, and strength. **MAR 12:30.**
 2. We are to keep ourselves from idols. **1JO 5:21.**
 3. idol: 1. An image or similitude of a deity or divinity, used as an object of worship.... 2. fig. Any thing or person that is the object of excessive or supreme devotion, or that usurps the place of God in human affection. [1557 N. T. (Genev.) 1 John v. 21 Babes kepe your selues from idoles.]
 - a. An idol may be tangible or intangible (as an abstract).
 - b. Covetousness is an idol in the abstract. **COL 3:5.**
 4. Anything that takes the place of God in our lives is an idol.
 - a. This could be your spouse, children, job, hobby, pleasure, or possessions.
 - b. This could also be the Internet, your computer, your smartphone, your tablet, social networking, texting, etc.
 5. Our God is a jealous God. **EXO 34:14.**
 - a. God is jealous for our worship and our attention.
 - b. We need to jealously guard our “Godspace” and not let anything replace the time and devotion that God deserves in our lives.
 6. Consider the observations of Dr. Hart in *The Digital Invasion*:
 - a. “It's almost as if the distractions that we allow the digital world to impose on us is a form of an idol that we worship instead of God.” (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 187)
 - b. “If, as Keller suggests, an idol is anything that is so important to you that if you were to lose it, you would feel that life wasn't worth living, then could we become guilty of creating 'counterfeit Gods'?” (Ibid)
 - c. “Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, YouTube, LinkedIn, Flickr, Pinterest, texting, or just plain emails are 'time ravenous.' While speaking with Christians, we keep hearing one consistent message: 'I'm finding it more and more difficult to find time for God.' Pastors and church members, male and female, young and old, are all being impacted, if you want a spiritual life, you will have to make space for it. It won't come naturally.” (Ibid, p. 188)
 - d. “The digital world has robbed our Godspace in another important way. It has made us informationally rich, but as a consequence, spiritually poor.” (Ibid, p. 189)
 7. Has all the information about God, scripture, theology, etc. on the Internet made

us more knowledgeable about God than prior generations who did not have it?

- a. Have Bible apps on the phones and tablets of Christians which allow them to be able to read the Bible any time and any place made us better students of scripture than our spiritual forefathers were?
- b. An inquisitor (circa 1050 A.D.) made this observation of Waldensians: “They had the Old and New Testament in the vulgar tongue; and they teach and learn so well, that he had seen and heard a country clown *recount all* of Job, word for word; and divers who could perfectly deliver all the New Testament; and that men and women, little and great, day and night, cease not to learn and teach.”
(G.H. Orchard, *Concise History of Baptists*, p. 266)

D. Digital technology poses a threat to our ability to connect with God. Consider what Dr. Hart has to say about digital technology negatively affecting our ability to connect with God:

1. “Scientists tell us that they are already seeing a diminished ability to reflect, meditate, or contemplate in those who over-engage with the digital world. With these decreased abilities, our intellectual capacity is also on the decline. While this foretells serious consequences for how we learn or develop our creativity, our greatest peril is that we can also lose our ability to commune with God. If we can't disengage from our digital technology and keep a vital Godspace alive, we may not be able to engage with God at all. We will not have the physical brain mechanisms to make this connection. Moreover, just in case you think this a little far-fetched, it would only take a neurosurgeon a minute to cut a few connections in the brain, and our ability to experience God would be gone. In other words, we need a healthy brain in order to maintain a healthy connection with God.

“Dr. Gary Small, a neuroscientist and expert on Alzheimer's disease and aging, has spent a lot of time researching the effects of the digital world on our brain. He has this to report:

'Technology side effects appear to be suppressing prefrontal lobe executive skills in the brain. Today, video-game-brain, Internet addiction, and other technology side effects appear to be suppressing frontal lobe executive skills and our ability to communicate face-to-face.'

“Our conversations with others help us to have conversations with ourselves and in turn to have conversations with God. If you can't communicate in a healthy way with people, you will also struggle to connect with God and to have good self-awareness.” (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 192-193)

2. “In essence, he states that when the prefrontal part of our brain, the part that does our main thinking, gets overloaded, it begins to shut itself down. Guess what is in our modern world that overloads the frontal part of the brain? Today's digital invasion targets mainly the frontal part of the brain, not only overusing it, but also depleting it of simple energy. This impairs our ability to think deeply, and consequently, communicate with God in a meaningful way.” (Ibid, p. 193)
3. “This now leads to the question, How can we protect our Godspace from the

digital invasion? Christian psychiatrist Dr. Curt Thompson tackles this topic in his book *Anatomy of the Soul*. He proposes that the key to this protection lies in the realm of our spiritual practices, such as regular prayer, reading Scripture, and face-to-face connections with other people who can help us develop a vital and healthy relationship with God.” (Ibid, p. 193)

4. Recall the instruction in the first part of this outline about the importance of meditation in the scriptures.
- E. Consider the need for *silence*.
 1. One important commodity in our lives which the digital invasion has robbed us of is silence.
 2. If we are going to experience God, it will only be by being still and silent.
 - a. There is a time for silence. **ECC 3:7; HAB 2:20.**
 - b. If we are going to know God, we need to be still. **PSA 46:10.**
 - c. We must stand still in order to *consider* the wonderful works of God. **JOB 37:14.**
 - d. consider: To view or contemplate attentively, to survey, examine, inspect, scrutinize. 3. trans. To contemplate mentally, fix the mind upon; to think over, meditate or reflect on, bestow attentive thought upon, give heed to, take note of.
 - e. We must stand still a while if we are to be shown the word of God. **1SAM 9:27.**
 - f. God can be near and we might not even know it. **GEN 28:16.**
 - g. Sometimes the Lord speaks in a *still small voice* (**1KI 19:11-12**) and we must get someplace alone to hear Him. **1KI 19:13.**
 3. Dr. Hart had the following to say about the importance of incorporating silence into our lives if we are to maintain a sound mind:
 - a. “Silence is a 'Sabbath of the mouth' and is about letting go of our inner distractions. It is probably the most challenging and least experienced spiritual discipline among Christians today. Technology is not only robbing our concentration but also our ability to just be alone and remain silent.” (Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 195)
 - b. “It seems like the more our senses become numb to the subtle ways in which God is speaking, the greater our hunger is for sensory overload. It is ironic that what our soul longs for is silence and solitude, but instead we fill our lives with noise and activity to pack the void.” (Ibid)
 - c. “Our brain desires and is wired for relaxation and rest from life's busyness. Amazingly, when we practice inner silence, it actually helps to restore important parts of the brain, especially the prefrontal cortex that is the thinking part of the brain, thus increasing our capacity to be creative and productive.” (Ibid, page 196)
 - d. “Studies have shown that the average person today, surrounded by the cyber world, can only bear about fifteen seconds of silence.” (Ibid, p. 197)
- F. Consider the need for *solitude*.
 1. “Without solitude it is almost impossible to have a spiritual life.” (Henri Nouwen)
 2. It is very important to take time each day to be alone.
 3. Jesus Himself needed time alone. **MAT 14:23; LUK 6:12.**

4. Jesus exhorted His disciples to come apart into a desert place to get away from the crowd. **MAR 6:31.**
 5. If we are to have silence, we must first have solitude.
 6. “Whereas *silence* is a 'Sabbath of the mouth,' *solitude* is a 'Sabbath of involvement.' Silence is about letting go of inner distractions and solitude is about letting go of your outer distractions.”
(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 197)
 7. “Distraction is the only thing that consoles us for our miseries, and yet it is itself the greatest of our miseries.” (Blaise Pascal)
- G. “Retire from the world each day to some private spot, even if it be only the bedroom... Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God's presence envelops you. Deliberately tune out the unpleasant sounds and come out of your closet determined not to hear them. Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it. Stop trying to compete with others. Give yourself to God and then be what and who you are without regard to what others think. Reduce your interests to a few. Don't try to know what will be of no service to you. Avoid the digest type of mind--short bits of unrelated facts, cute stories and bright sayings. Learn to pray inwardly every moment. After a while you can do this even while you work. Practice candor, childlike honesty, humility. Pray for a single eye. Read less, but read more of what is important to your inner life. Never let your mind remain scattered for very long. Call home your roving thoughts. Gaze on Christ with the eyes of your soul. Practice spiritual concentration.” (A.W. Tozer)

XV. “But can't digital technology be used to preach and further the gospel?”

- A. Digital technology can be used to further the gospel, just like the technological invention of the printing press was used to further the gospel by printing Bibles.
- B. We have a website for our church which truth-seekers can use to find out about us.
- C. We digitally record sermons and Bible studies and put them on the Internet for people to listen to or download. I have published many meditations online also.
 1. The downside of this is that it not only facilitates truth-seekers or church members who cannot be here, it also facilitates outliers who like religion without commitment.
 2. I fear that this has also engrained in us a false sense of accomplished duty for Christ relative to witness and evangelism. Have we mentally substituted digital publishing online for personal witness?
 3. The track record of members being added to the body because of the church website is dismal.
- D. E-Sword and other Bible study programs are wonderful tools to help us search the scriptures. But with all these “helps,” could any of us match 5% of what those old Waldensians could do?
- E. Whereas God can use technology to accomplish His purposes, He doesn't need technology to do so.
 1. The apostles turned the world upside down without even a printing press. **ACT 17:6.**
 2. They preached the gospel *to all the world (COL 1:6)* and *to every creature under heaven (COL 1:23)* without the Internet or modern transportation.
 3. The devil needs technology to accomplish his goal of world empire, but God does not need it to accomplish His goals. **ZEC 4:6.**

XVI. Closing thoughts.

- A. Outside of a major catastrophe which wipes out electronics, digital technology is here to stay. Neither is it going to fizzle out like the Pony Express. Consumer-level digital technology is likely to soon be in the hands of every person on earth and its sophistication growing exponentially. The genie is out of the bottle and we are not likely to get him back in it.
1. Mankind has demonstrated an incredible capacity to adapt to technological innovations but not without significant social, cultural, emotional and spiritual damage sometimes.
 2. Digital technology, particularly its pseudo-connectedness, its virtual reality, its erosion of privacy, its trigger-points of control and pleasure and its addictiveness represent a level of potential social, cultural, emotional and spiritual damage that, in my opinion, exceeds that of previous innovations and the necessary “scaling back” for the sake of survival will be a long time coming, if ever.
 3. The biggest threat from digitalization is its substitution for an ever-present, all-knowing God at Whose right hand “...are pleasures for evermore” (**PSA 16:10**).
- B. Children are especially at risk for having their healthy development thwarted by the digital revolution. I cannot impress upon parents strongly enough the need to not give in to the societal pressure to allow children unrestricted use of digital devices and unregulated access to the internet. Even secular observers recommend limits, as seen in the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (cited in *The Digital Invasion*, pp. 168-169):

“Recommended Screen Limits for Children

Children ages 0 to 2 -- No screen time. Babies need all five senses to develop at this stage, and the digital screen only develops two of these senses, namely seeing and hearing.

Children ages 3 to 5 -- One hour per day. This is the age of make-believe. They have no logic at this age so they need to spend playtime with other children.

Children ages 6 to 12 -- No more than ninety minutes per day.

Teenagers 13 to 19 -- Two hours a day.”

1. Frankly, I am persuaded that these limits are set too high, especially if the screen time is devoted to idle pursuits.
 2. Parents: be honest and realistic! What would you have done as youths if you had unlimited and unregulated access to the internet?
 3. Let not the inevitability of something offensive ruin your child. **LUK 17:1-2**.
- C. We need to strive to distinguish between digital sin (pornography, pride, narcissism, emulation, envy, gossip, addiction, neglect of duty to family or job, etc.), digital danger and digital etiquette. This world may be used if not abused. **1CO 7:31**.
- D. “That laptop or smartphone you have is not inherently evil, but the value you place on it will determine whether it serves you or you serve it.”
(Dr. Archibald D. Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, p. 41)