

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*, page 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, page 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, page 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*, page 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*, page 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, page 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*, page 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, page 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, page 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)