

SEPTEMBER 2022

# UNPLUGGING

Practice of the Month



"If we were interacting with anything else for that amount of time, I'm confident we'd be talking more about how that interaction shapes us."

Dr. Dodgen-Magee



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# WHAT IS UNPLUGGING?

Unplugging calls us to leave the virtual world of technology in order to become present with others, present with God, and present with ourselves.



# WHY PRACTICE IT?



It would be impossible to count the ways in which technology has helped improve our world. From modern medicine, to the way it's allowed us to reach people across the world, we reap the benefits of technological advances every day. But while the advantages are obvious, the costs are less so, and yet, those costs have just as many implications on our everyday lives.

The mental health epidemic, the increase in social anxiety, the inability to think for ourselves, and the inability to be present with others, be present with God, or even be present with our own souls— technology so often plays a role in all of this! It's a short journey from owning a device to that device owning you and wreaking havoc on your life in ways that often go unnoticed or don't seem like a big deal, when they actually are.

The average Canadian spends 7 hours per day in the digital world. In response to statistics like this, psychologist Doreen Dodgen-Magee has this to say in the Washington Post regarding the screen time of Americans, who sit just above 7 hours per day, “If Americans were interacting with anything else for 7-plus hours a day, I feel confident we'd be talking more about how that interaction shapes us.” What Dr. Dodgen-Magee is getting at, is that it's a problem that we spend that amount of time engaged with something (or in something) with disregard for the implication it has on ourselves.

As disciples of Jesus –those who have a vision for who we want to become– our use of technology needs to be shaped by our desire to become more like Jesus. To have no boundaries and guidelines regarding our use of technology is basically saying, “although I want to be whole self to be intentionally shaped by the Holy Spirit, I'm going to ignore the thing that spends 7 hours a day shaping me.”

In a world that's defined by anxiety, worry, busyness, distraction, relational failures, and that's generally unaware of the presence our Triune God, we need to develop healthy rhythms of unplugging from the virtual world and address our addiction to technology– an addiction that challenges our ability to be present like Jesus.



# WHERE DO WE SEE JESUS ENGAGE IN IT?

Jesus didn't have an iPhone. He didn't have a Netflix subscription. He didn't run a killer podcast, nor was he constantly tweeting about his issues with the religious leaders of the day. In the sermon on the mount, you won't find Jesus telling you what your weekly screentime should be. So in a way, monitoring our use of technology isn't really a practice of Jesus.

But as you read the gospels, what you do notice is how present Jesus was. How well he would respond to interruptions, how well he would engage with people around him, how in tune he was with his Father, and how he knew himself well enough to know he needed to get away from the crowds to be alone with his Father. Jesus was always present with what was going on around him— present with others, present with God, and present with himself.

The reason we consider unplugging as a practice of Jesus is because technology poses our biggest threat to being a person who is present to the moment, the way Jesus was present to the moment. So if we want to be present the way Jesus was, then we need to address our biggest challenge to that, which for many of us, is technology.

Healthy guidelines and boundaries around our use of technology isn't restricting, its actually freeing. It frees us up to better abide with Jesus, be more aware of his presence, better interact with the people around us, better understand our own souls, and creates space for the Spirit of God to transform us more into his likeness.

A hand holding a smartphone, with the power-off slider visible at the top right. The slider is a light blue bar with a red power button icon on the left and the text "slide to power off" on the right. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a person's legs in jeans visible at the bottom.

# REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How has technology influenced your relationships? Do friends and family complain about the amount of time you spend online? What is their real concern?
- Are you online for both work and pleasure? What do you like about being online? What don't you like about it?
- What sorts of temptations does the online world create for you? How do you address these temptations?
- Where are you using technology to avoid face-to-face encounters?
- Have you ever been "yelled at" via email? What was that like for you?

# SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

There isn't a one size fits all way of monitoring our use of technology. It's going to differ based on who you are. Below are some helpful things you can experiment with to help:

- Parent your phone. Put it to bed before you and let it sleep in (aka. don't use it for the first and last 30min of your day). We're at our most vulnerable state when we first wake up and when we're about to go to bed. Don't subject yourselves to misguided and manipulative messages that you find online when you're vulnerable. Instead, use that time to read, pray, chat with a family member or spouse, or simply spend time in silence and solitude.
- Turn your smart phone into a dumb phone. This can include anything from: taking email off your phone, removing social media from your phone, turning off notifications (even for text messages), deleting news apps, deleting every app that you don't need or doesn't make your life easier, turning your phone to grayscale mode (this does something neurobiologically that I'm not smart enough to explain, something to do with decreasing dopamine addiction. Google it lol).
- Keep your phone off until after your morning quiet time. The first minutes of your day are going to set the tone for the rest of it. Don't allow your phone to set your emotional equilibrium and your news feed set your view of the world. This is a sure-fire recipe for anger, not love. Misery, not joy. And definitely not peace.

# SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

- Manage your social media use. Social media is a black hole that consumes your time and removes you from the reality of the present moment. Be careful how you use it. Set a time limit for social media apps, only access them from your computer, only use the browser version, or get off social media altogether. Remember, the end goal is not to remove yourself from social media, as if you're a better Jesus follower if you do. The end goal is to be present to the moment... so manage it with that end in mind.
- Manage your TV use. This can include anything from reducing the number of streaming subscriptions you have, removing your TV from the bedroom, limiting yourself to a certain number of shows/games to watch each week, refraining from watching TV alone and only doing it with other people, etc.
- Practice a Sabbath, specifically without technology. Allow this technology free-day to shape the way you live life the other 6 days of the week.
- Write someone a letter of encouragement. Use this as an opportunity to connect with someone else while remaining unplugged.

\*Many of the above suggestions came from John Mark Comer's Book, "The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry". If you're looking for your next read, look no further!