

Christadelphian Caring Network Bulletin

Winter
2017



Need someone to talk to? The Christadelphian Care Line is open for calls. Caring, confidential brothers and sisters are ready to listen and help. Our toll-free support line is 866-823-1039.

Following Jesus in a World of Digital Media

THERE IS NO QUESTION that digital technology has wonderful benefits. The Internet can enhance Bible study and provide new preaching opportunities. Electronic communication – from email to skyping – has allowed brothers and sisters in isolation to stay connected with our community. Social media has been used to rally people to pray, to donate to important causes, and to rejoice together.

However, this technology also has many potential negative aspects. The challenge is to be mindful when using it. Individuals and families committed to following Jesus must navigate the digital media landscape in a thoughtful, responsible way.

In and of itself, digital media is neither good nor evil; it is simply a tool. How you use this tool will determine whether it has positive or negative consequences. That is why Bible believers must be mindful about their use of digital media and the devices that deliver it.

Trends

The adoption and normalization of new technologies into everyday life has been rapid and extensive. The digital revolution of the past twenty-five years has transformed entertainment, shopping, communication, learning, and thinking. Society has widely embraced personal computers, laptops, cellphones, tablets, smart phones and wearable devices, and these electronic devices are now entwined in every aspect of life. They have become commonplace in homes, bedrooms, family rooms, cars and even at dinner

tables. They are versatile, mobile, and interactive, providing immediate communication and information.

How can the proliferation of digital media affect your walk in Christ? Consider this excerpt from a Pew Research Center report published in December 2014:

Humans, their institutions, and their norms never adapt to changed circumstances as quickly as the technology advances and often do not respond even to obviously pressing problems until after catastrophe occurs. (*What will digital life look like in 2025? Highlights from our reports*, by Lee Rainie and Janna Anderson)

The above statement strongly implies a need for users to be wary in their use of digital media. The words of many experts attest to the power of this technology:

- In 1981, when Steve Jobs was asked whether people would embrace this new technology, he said, “It’s going to be very gradual and very human and we’ll seduce you into learning how to use it.”

Inside...

TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS

Robert Chisholm
2206 Donald Road
Burlington, ON L7N 3R9

PLAN TO ATTEND

Annual Care Seminar

April 1, 2017

“Become a Caring Ecclesia”
at the Toronto West Ecclesia

For information:

Website – caringnetwork.ca

Email – training@caringnetwork.ca

2016 ACTIVITIES

Financial Seminars

February 20 & March 19

Presented by Rick Farrar

As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:10)

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Phil 4:8)

- Nicholas Carr, in his book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, published in 2011, writes, “the seductions of technology are hard to resist.”
- B.J. Fogg, the research lead at the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab stated that smartphones are the “Greatest persuasive technology, ever.”

What is the message to anyone trying to follow Jesus today? These comments should serve as a reminder of the absolute necessity to use digital media mindfully. Take time to establish rules and principles for yourself and your family. Don't jeopardize your faith by letting it take over.

When Digital Media is in Control

Over-use of digital media has the potential to subvert a life of faith in various significant ways.

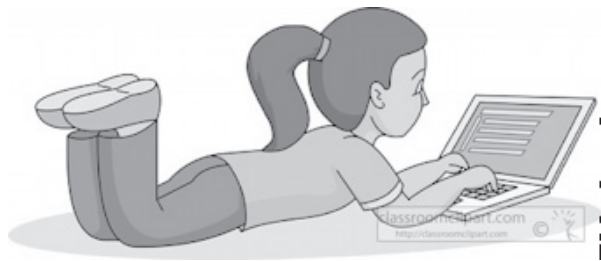
Time

Time is one of the most precious resources our Heavenly Father has given us. Although daily tasks and responsibilities eat up much time, people in the Western world have a great deal of free time and the ability to do what they want with it.

For Bible believers the scriptures offer guidance on how to use discretionary time. Consider the words of the Psalmist: “on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2); and “I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night” (Psalm 63:6). Our Heavenly Father knows that to survive the trials and temptations of this world, His people need to spend their time meditating on and delighting in God's word both day and night.

What happens however, when the seduction of digital media is out of control? Do you ever sit down, “Just to check your email,” and then arise three hours later surprised at how much time has flown by? Do you ever lie in bed at the end of the day with pangs of guilt because you spent hours on social media yet couldn't find any time to do the Bible readings? If so, then it may be time to make some changes.

According to the Nielson Company Audience Report, published in June of 2016, the average American spends 10 hours and 39 minutes consuming digital media each day. That's 10 hours a day consuming the world, its ways and its views. How does this consumption of time online compare with time spent reading the Bible, praying and meditating?



Again, the Psalmist speaks to the danger of devoting time to human inventions:

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.
(Psalm 115:3-8)

There are disturbing connections to those who do not control their use of digital technologies, who turn away from human interactions and relate more and more with the devices they carry.

Content

The famous educator John Dewey said, “Environment teaches.” People will learn from the environment with which they surround themselves. The question is, what does one learn from a life spent online?

The Bible has given good direction on how to live while awaiting the return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. James advises believers to keep themselves unstained from the world (James 1:27). Peter says to “be holy in all your conduct” (1 Peter 1:15) surely quoting from God's directive in Leviticus 20:7: “Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God.”

Do online activities jeopardize your ability to follow these instructions? Surely many of the things offered online are not harmful. But subtle and persuasive messages constantly bombard the online world, despite best efforts to avoid them.

Three specific types of content to be wary of are:

- 1) consumerism and materialism;
- 2) violence; and
- 3) sex and the sexualisation of young people.

If consumed mindlessly, this type of content can change the way both children and adults think, what they believe, and what they consider normal. Remember the warning about what will happen in the last days, when people disregard the wisdom of the word of God:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. (2 Timothy 3:1-4)

Develop the ability to recognize the cleverly crafted content that often appears online. Be attentive to the explicit and implicit messages being delivered and the power they can have.



Thankfulness and Contentment

One of the greatest ways to praise and honour our Heavenly Father is through thanksgiving. Many scriptures speak of the importance of living lives of thankfulness.

- Psalm 50:14: “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High.”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
- Hebrews 13:5: “Be content with what you have.”
- 1 Timothy 6:6: “Godliness with contentment is great gain.”

What happens to someone who is unrestrained in their consumption of digital media? Does digital media push a believer towards thankfulness and contentment, or does it drive him or her towards covetousness and dissatisfaction? By not being careful about the time spent online or the content consumed, a person can easily fall into the trap of discontentment. Consider the following:

- Characters on TV and in movies rarely have boring, low paying jobs.
- Advertisements are designed to make viewers feel inadequate.
- Renovation shows always show the biggest and the best.
- Social media sites can lead followers to feeling envious of others and what they have.

Once again, be wary of the negative impact digital media can have in our lives.

We’re constantly exposed to people who have more than we do and rarely see those who have less – a lack of perspective that’s a formula for dissatisfaction. (“Invisible Poor,” by James Fallows, *New York Times Magazine*, March, 2000)

Jesus warned us in the Parable of the Sower that “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.”

Relationships

What impact can digital media have on relationships with family members and members of the ecclesia? The trends point towards a future where individuals will spend

less and less time with one another. Already many seek communication through digital means rather than face to face. A common sight in public spaces is people ignoring one another in favour of their screens. The relationships we have are another great gift from our Heavenly Father. Consider the important interaction you have on a daily basis and also how God wants to be a part of those interactions.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

Many experts in the field of mental health have noticed disturbing trends with this growing reliance on digital media, and how it is replacing essential family relationships. Catherine Steiner-Adair writes in her book, *The Big Disconnect*, “Nothing can match the power of our attention, our capacity to connect in affirming, loving, nourishing ways. Screens and technology cannot match it, but they can replace it if we let it happen.”

In 1854, Henry David Thoreau wrote *Walden*, a book that chronicled two years he spent living in a cabin near Concord, Massachusetts. He felt he needed to step away from society and reflect on what was truly important. In this book he stated, “I do not wish to live what was not life.” Do you consider a life spent online life? Will you one day look back on your life and wish you had spent more time with your devices, or will you regret all of the time you could have spent with loved ones?

If you let your use of digital media get out of control, it will consume your time, engulf you in ungodly material, leave you discontented and unsatisfied, and damage the very relationships God has provided for your spiritual walk.

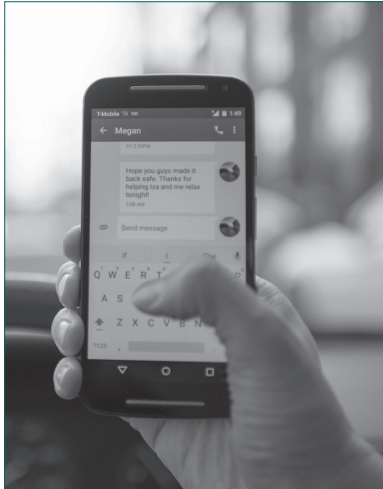
Take Control

The following are some recommended strategies to help all members of the family keep their digital media use in control.

Make God’s Ways Your Ways

Write God’s ways on the tablets of your heart. Know them, see the value in them, and love them. Only then will discernment of the issues inherent in digital media be made easier. The Bible gives us some very good instruction that can help us stay on the right path. Assess your media use against the principles set out in verses like the ones below:

- Colossians 3:1-2: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things



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that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

- James 3:17: “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”
- Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”
- Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Set Limits

Clear rules are an essential tool to enable the whole family to make the best use of media.

- *Time* – How long will you allow each day? Establish a limit and then stick to it. Also consider when you will use digital media, and when you will not use it. This could mean set times of day (e.g., never after 8 pm, only from 6 pm to 7 pm), or it could exclude whole days (Sundays).
- *Place* – Where will you allow digital technology to be in your home? Will you have tech-free zones?

I suggest never allowing it at the dinner table, and many experts say digital media, in any form, should never be allowed in the bedroom.

- *Rules* – Create rules for use together as a family, remembering that you are trying to help each other stay close to God. Establish them on a biblical basis, and enforce them. Institute clear consequences, and most importantly model responsible use. It is important to have “lines that won’t be crossed.”

Fill Time With Other Things

Texting, web surfing, social media, and viewing or listening to downloaded material can take up all your time and leave nothing for God, family, or friends. Break this kind of dependency on easy distractions. Other activities can take more effort, but can also be much more rewarding than staring mindlessly at a screen.

- Enjoy off-line activities: e.g., Bible study, playing games or an instrument, puzzles, reading, exercise, volunteering.
- Reconnect with nature – God gave this world to us for our enjoyment and our health.
- Get together with friends and family and begin building strong relationships.

View, Discuss, Discern Together

Inevitably, everyone in the family is going to be exposed to the messaging of digital media. It is essential to learn how to critically analyse it. Sitting down together and having a critical look at some of the content can enable adults and children to pick out underlying media messages.

- Search for truth by deconstructing the message.
 - Who created this media message? Who paid for it?
 - Who is the targeted audience? Why are they targeted?

- What methods of persuasion have they used?
- What is the overt message? What is the implied message? Is it true?
- What ideas or values are being sold in this message?

- Discuss the values presented in a commercial, song, movie, or TV show, and compare them to God’s message.
- Focus on the positive. If you are going to have a presence online, make sure it is a positive image. Let people know about your faith and your hope. Only post comments and pictures that are positive and edifying.

Educate Yourself

Don’t block your ears and hope it will go away.

- Consult credible books and websites. Some recommendations: Center on Media and Child Health, cmch.tv; commonsensemedia.org; Family Online Safety Institute, fosi.org; *The Big Disconnect* by Catherine Steiner-Adair (2014); *The Other Parent* by James Steyer (2002).

Be Still

There are no still waters online. Constant use of digital devices leaves people anxious, dissatisfied and disillusioned. Counter its effects by spending more time with God.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. (Psalm 23:1)

- Schedule some quiet time every day.
- Take time for prayer and reading.
- Turn it off – take a digital media fast. This may mean one day a week, or turning it off for a week.

Bro. John Perks (Ottawa, ON)

All quotes are from the ESV.