

Unplugged: Disconnect to Reconnect

By Frank M. Hasel

We live in extraordinary times in human history.

We are globally connected. With ease we can communicate with friends, virtually around the world. New technologies open up unparalleled opportunities to spread the gospel and the Advent message. They can aid us in our study of the Bible, but they can also lure us into sin. Today we have become accustomed to being constantly available, and in turn we expect to have instant access to the Internet. Yet the World Wide Web brings with it a strange paradox. At the same speed it connects us around the world it often seems to isolate us from real-life relationships around the corner. The focus is on a virtual reality and on me!

When I recently visited a restaurant and waited for my food, I noticed that, without exception, all the other customers were using their smartphones. Riding a public bus in a capital city of Europe, I noticed that virtually all passengers made no eye contact with one another, but focused on their smartphones instead and continued to do so when they left the bus!

We don't need to ask for directions anymore, because we have an app that will guide us. We don't have to discuss different opinions with colleagues and friends, because we can Google the answer ourselves. With our smartphone and the Internet we are self-sufficient, it seems. We can roam the whole world and have access to sheer endless information.

Yet our souls are strangely captive to our "smart" devices. We quickly find ourselves enslaved by a new addiction. It is increasingly hard to simply sit and wait and focus on one thing. To us, waiting has become wasting.

The data

The average American dedicates 30 percent of leisure time to perusing the Web.

Fifty percent of people prefer to communicate digitally rather than in person.

Sixty-one percent admit to being addicted to the Internet and their devices.

Sixty-seven percent of cell phone owners find themselves checking their device even when it's not ringing or vibrating.

The average employee checks 40 Web sites a day, switching activities 37 times an hour, changing tasks every two minutes. However, only 2 percent of people can actually multitask without a decline in performance.

Thirty-three percent of people admit to hiding from family and friends to check social media.

Ninety-five percent of people use some type of electronics in the hour leading up to bed. Artificial light from screens increases alertness and suppresses the hormone melatonin by up to 22 percent, thus negatively affecting sleep, performance, and mood.¹

Unplugging for just one day can give some users mental and physical withdrawal symptoms.

A recent survey revealed that 93 percent of 16 to 17-year-old teenagers in Germany own a smartphone and find it virtually impossible to live without it. For them, not to chat means not to live.² In many other countries reality looks very similar. The wireless Web has acquired such a prominent status in our lives that it carries almost religious overtones: “Behave—what you do today will be on Facebook tomorrow.” Or “Live as if it were the last day of your Internet access.” The reference point for my behavior and life has shifted from God to the new media. My life is not a constant walk with God, but rather has become a steady walk with my smartphone.

Another Kind of Fast

There are many things to unlearn in order to develop a new appreciation for real-life experiences. We deliberately need to disengage from things that crowd our life, clutter our relationships, and isolate us from each other. We need to detach from things that distract our undivided attention and poison our spiritual life. We need to digitally detox.³ We need to disconnect in order to reconnect with real life and with God. Rather than idolizing our smartphone way of life, the really smart move is to use it wisely and with proper priorities.

Here we can learn from biblical men and women of faith: when they realized their need to reconnect with God, they shifted their attention and started fasting (cf. Esther 4:3; 2 Chron. 20:3; Dan. 9:3; Acts 13:2, 3).⁴ The biblical practice of fasting can help us develop a new code of ethics concerning our use of new technologies, a code that will positively impact the future of our spiritual walk.

Fasting is the deliberate abstention from something that actually is available to me but might distract me from God. Whatever keeps me busy and captivates my time, energy, and attention receives a time-out that allows for an unhurried and obedient listening to what God has to say. Through fasting I consciously set aside undisturbed time for God that otherwise would be filled with mundane things. My vision turns from the routines of my small and often limited human perspective to things of eternal significance. By abstaining from what consumes and nourishes me on a daily basis, I signal that I, as a human being, do not live by bread alone nor by my online connection to the Internet, but by “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

As such, fasting should not “be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose.”⁵

Try to relinquish television, the Internet, e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, smartphones, etc., for some time in order to redeem precious time to concentrate on God and His Word. That is the need of the hour. Today, with the Internet constantly available, we suffer not

only from an information overload but also from spending more screen time than personal quality time with God.

Disconnecting from the technology that has lured us into thinking that we cannot live without it will enable us to pause and regain a healthy perspective for real-life experiences and for God.

In fact, we may just hunger for more of that.

Ideas for Digital Detox:

1. In the morning, go online only after you have taken time with God and His Word, and only after you have taken time to decide what you have to do. This way God and you determine your agenda, not incoming urgent e-mails.
2. Work twice a day for one hour offline. Put your phone in flight mode and turn your Internet connection off. You will be amazed how productive you will be.
3. Why not set aside a half day or a day once or twice a month during which you deliberately disconnect in order to focus on what is important to you spiritually, professionally, and personally?
4. Check your e-mails only during restricted periods during the day. Have your e-mail inbox turned off during the rest of the day.
5. In the hour before you go to sleep, turn off your computer and smartphone and read a good book. Why not the Bible?
6. Have you thought about Sabbath rest for your digital world? Leave your phone in flight mode (or at home) and purposefully don't boot up your computer.

[Frank M. Hasel, Ph.D.](#), serves as Associate Director for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference headquarters in Maryland. While he cannot be found on Facebook, he praises God for the marvelous opportunities new media offers us. He is convinced that there is real life beyond the virtual world of the Internet. Pacific Press has just recently released a new book authored by Dr. Hasel titled *Longing for God: A Prayer and Bible Journal*. This 352 page book leads the reader through the entire Bible in one year

<https://www.revivalandreformation.org/resources/all/unplugged-disconnect-to-reconnect>