



Three ways that technology threatens our faith, and seven ways to fight back

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I am going to start by saying that I love technology. So, this article is not going to be preaching any radical digital detox, or make you feel guilty because you have an Instagram account. What's more, the current Covid-19 pandemic has shown technology put to good use has been a blessing. In the case of my own ecclesia, technologies like Zoom video conferencing meant that we were still able to meet around the Word together three times a week. I can't imagine how lonely and depressing the months isolated at home would have been without this.

I do, however, think that technology presents some real challenges to our faith in our age, and I think that we are long overdue for having serious discussions about that in order to help each other overcome those challenges.

Let me introduce myself...

Before we launch into it, for those of you reading this that don't know me, here is a little background to convince you that I am not really just a Luddite in disguise.

I am currently a software developer by trade, so I spend around 40 hours a week glued to a computer screen—well, more often than not, two screens, actually.

I have had a smartphone since around 2008, which may not sound like that long ago, but 2008 was when iPhones first became commercially available in New Zealand. I was lucky enough to get one as part of my job, so I have been a smartphone user/addict for a few years longer than most Christadelphians, because smartphone ownership didn't really take off until around 2011.

I have a Facebook account, an Instagram account, and a Twitter account, and am even known to tweet a thing or two, mostly work-related.

All of this I mention just to show that I am not anti-technology by any means. However, there are some things that I personally struggle with, and I know that the use of technology can have an impact on my faith. If I struggle, then I am sure many of you also struggle, too. So, the ideas outlined in this article are about helping each other, and not condemning each

The threats of technology to our faith

other because of our weaknesses. This article is not an all-encompassing look at the subject. You may have different struggles and different ways of overcoming them, but I hope that this article can at least be used as a means of promoting discussion in your family and local ecclesia, in order that we might all help each other in the ongoing battles we face.

Three ways technology threatens our faith

Let me now outline the three key areas that I think technology threatens our faith. And, as I work through each of these, I will look at some ways to at least get started with overcoming each of them..

First, here are three key practices that God encourages us to engage in to develop and maintain our faith:

1. Meditate on His Word day and night (Psalm 1).
2. Build each other up in the faith (Eph. 4:29; 1 Thess 5:11).
3. Remain separate from the world, so that we might be holy as He is holy (2 Cor. 6:17; 1 Peter 1:16).

I suggest that technology presents a threat to each of these, for technology:

1. Diminishes our ability to think deeply on God's Word.
2. Provides a medium where we find it all too easy to pull each other down.
3. Puts the worst that the world has to offer at our fingertips.

1. Meditating on God's Word

We don't need to spend much time reminding ourselves how important it is for our faith to take in the Word daily. Psalm 1 talks about the blessings that come upon a man that does this. But God doesn't intend just a mindless scanning of the text. The word "meditate" in Psalm 1 is translated from a Hebrew word that means "to murmur", and by implication, "to ponder". God wants us to read His Word and ponder what it says and its implications for how we should live our lives. The Jews of old would do this in a literal out-loud conversation. They would murmur to themselves and discuss it with God, as they debated the principles of whatever passage they were reading. God wants us to intently mull over the Word. We may be too reserved to do this by talking out loud to ourselves, but we can still have an internal discussion with ourselves and God. Chewing the cud is the wonderful analogy that the Law gives us of the process God intends.

What is the ultimate aim of this process though? God wants our minds to be transformed. He wants us to be saturated with His Word and ponder it so deeply that it transforms the way we think, and, consequently, the way that we live our lives.

In Romans 12:2, the Apostle Paul tells us that we need to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind." The idea of renewing is to renovate, or completely change for the better. The

The threats of technology to our faith

amazing thing is that this is not just an analogy. Scientists have proven that the things we think about physically change our brain.

Thought changes our brains physically

One well-known experiment in this vein was undertaken by Pascual-Leone, a Professor of Neurology. He recruited people who had no experience playing a piano, and he taught them how to play a simple melody. He then split the participants into two groups and had the members of one group practice the melody on a keyboard for two hours a day over the next five days. The members of the other group he asked to sit in front of a keyboard for the same amount of time, but to just imagine playing the song, without touching the keys at all¹.

Using a technique called transcranial magnetic stimulation, or TMS, he then mapped the brain activity of all the participants before, during, and after the test. He discovered that the people who only imagined playing the notes showed exactly the same changes in their brains as those who had actually practiced on the keys. Their brains changed in response to the actions that only took place in their imagination; in other words, their brains were physically changed by their thoughts.

Neurologically, we become what we think.

Book reading helps develop more than just knowledge

Before we have a look at how technology may be hindering the transformation that God is looking for, let's have a brief look at how reading books can positively assist in this transforming process. Nicolas Carr, in his book, *The Shallows*, makes the following observations about book reading:

What is so remarkable about book reading is that deep concentration is combined with the highly active and efficient deciphering of text and interpretation of meaning. The reading of a sequence of printed pages is valuable not just for the knowledge that readers acquire from the author's words but for the way those words set off intellectual vibrations within their own mind. In the quiet spaces opened up by the prolonged, undistracted reading of a book, people made their own associations, drew their own inferences and analogies, fostered their own ideas. They thought deeply as they read deeply. (Carr, *The Shallows*. Kindle loc: 1,038)

Reading a book is a meditative act, but it doesn't involve a clearing of the mind. It involves a filling, or replenishing, of the mind. Readers disengage their attention from the outward flow of passing stimuli in order to engage it more deeply with an inward flow of words, ideas, and emotions. That is the essence of the unique mental process of deep reading. (Kindle loc: 1,046)

To read a book is to practice an unnatural process of thought, one that demands sustained, unbroken attention to a single, static object. It requires readers to place themselves at what T. S. Eliot, in *Four Quartets*, would call "the still point

¹ A Pasual-Leone, et al, "Modulation of Muscle Responses Evoked by Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation During the Acquisition of New Fine Motor Skills", 1995

The threats of technology to our faith

of the turning world.” You have to train your brain to ignore everything else going on around you, to resist the urge to let your focus skip from one sensory cue to another. You have to forge or strengthen the neural links needed to counter your instinctive distractedness, applying greater “top-down control” over your attention. (Kindle loc: 1,030)

These are obviously just the views of Nicholas Carr and T.S Elliot, but I am sure you agree that they provide a good summary of the process of reading a book or a longer article. You put aside all distractions, and you are totally engaged and absorbed in the words. Nothing else matters in those moments; you only have the words in front of you and your thoughts. My wife can certainly attest to this. If I am reading something, she knows it is a waste of time talking to me because I won't hear anything she is saying!

Doesn't this description of reading also tie in beautifully with what God requires of us in meditating on His Word? We need to block out all outside distractions, focus on filling our mind with the Word, chewing it over, and making our own connections and associations with the principles expressed so that it becomes a part of us.

Do you deep read?

So, when was the last time that you sat down and got truly lost in reading the Word? When was the last time you read a book on the Truth, or even a complete article? When was the last time that you memorised a section of Scripture so that you could have it available to meditate upon even when you didn't have the written Word handy?

For some of you the answer to those questions might be today, or last week, or at least last month, but for many of you, you probably haven't read an entire book for years, and possibly haven't even read a complete article from beginning to end for years either. I have to say that when I first came into the Truth some 25 years ago, I was an avid reader. I read a lot of the pioneer works and would always have a mix of other fiction and non-fiction books on the go. But sometime in the 2000s I started reading a lot less, and very rarely opened a book, and even more rarely for a cover-to-cover read. In the last couple of years, I have had to make a deliberate effort to force myself back into the deeper reading afforded by books and articles.

The reason for a lack of deep reading

Why the shift away from deep reading? Although there is research to show why, I think most of us know from personal experience that the Internet, or more specifically the Web and smartphones, actively discourage prolonged periods of deeply meditative reading and thinking. They, in fact, encourage quite the opposite.

As Nicholas Carr states:

When we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning. It's possible to think deeply while surfing the Net, just as it's possible to think shallowly while reading a book, but that's not the type of thinking the technology encourages and rewards. (Kindle loc: 1,830)

But this is not just his opinion; much research supports this view. As far back as 1989, a study showed that readers of hypertext (an example of hypertext is the link in a web page,

The threats of technology to our faith

which, when clicked, takes you to a different spot on the page, or to a completely different page) often ended up clicking distractedly “through pages instead of reading them carefully.” In a study conducted in 2001 on the difference in comprehension rates between reading hypertext and non-hypertext documents, the research clearly showed that:

With hypertext, “the absorbed and personal mode of reading seems to be discouraged.” The readers’ attention “was directed toward the machinery of the hypertext and its functions rather than to the experience offered by the story.” (Miall and Dobson, “Reading Hypertext and the Experience of Literature”, 2001).

And in 2007, researchers in a different study concluded:

The multimedia technologies so common to the Web, “would seem to limit, rather than enhance, information acquisition.” (Rockwell and Singleton, “The Effect of the Modality of Presentation of Streaming Multimedia on Information Acquisition”, 2007)

If we truly want the blessings that come from meditating on God’s Word—a transformed mind, or the mind of Christ—and, if the only reading we are doing is skimming content online, then we significantly reduce our chances of achieving that aim.

Addicted to distraction

I need to also highlight the “distraction” factor that goes hand in hand with this lack of deep reading. It is all very well to sit down with the aim of actually reading a book, but if we are constantly distracted by our devices it is going to be much more difficult to achieve our aim of meditation and quiet contemplation.

First, it is worthwhile noting that it is in the best interest of the large corporations driving technology to make us as distractible as possible:

Google’s profits are tied directly to the velocity of people’s information intake. The faster we surf across the surface of the Web—the more links we click, and pages we view—the more opportunities Google gains to collect information about us and to feed us advertisements. Its advertising system, moreover, is explicitly designed to figure out which messages are most likely to grab our attention and then to place those messages in our field of view. Every click we make on the Web marks a break in our concentration, a bottom-up disruption of our attention—and it’s in Google’s economic interest to make sure we click as often as possible. The last thing the company wants is to encourage leisurely reading or slow, concentrated thought. Google is, quite literally, in the business of distraction. (Carr, *The Shallows*, Kindle loc: 2,467.)

Now that we have the power of the internet in our pockets, its powerful, distracting influence beckons to us day and night. As Adam Gazzaley and Larry Rosen state in their book, *The Distracted Mind*:

Glance around a restaurant, look at people walking on a city street, pay attention to people waiting in line for a movie or the theatre, and you will see busily tapping fingers. We act as though we are no longer interested in or able to stay idle and simply do nothing. We appear to care more about the people who are

The threats of technology to our faith

available through our devices than those who are right in front of our faces. And perhaps more critically, we appear to have lost the ability to simply be alone with our thoughts. (Gazzaley and Rosen, *The Distracted Mind*, page 112.)

Why are our digital devices so compelling and so distracting? Consider what investigative journalist Robert Kolker had to say in a report that he wrote about the very real dangers of drivers being distracted by their devices:

Distraction is the devil in your ear - not always the result of an attention deficit, but borne of our own desires. (Kolker, "Attention Must be Paid", 2014)

Now that is an interesting phrase, "the devil in your ear". Let's put that in terms that we might be happier using:

"Distraction is the carnal mind in your ear - not always the result of an attention deficit, but borne of our own desires."

Kolker probably used this as a throwaway line, but if we take a look at the psychology of distraction, we begin to see just how chillingly accurate it is. Robert Lustig, a professor of paediatrics, had this to say about the addictive nature of smartphones:

The cellphone is like a slot machine in your pocket. With every ding, a variable reward, either good or bad, is in store for the user - the ultimate dopamine rush. (Lustig, Robert H., *The Hacking of the American Mind*, page 192.)

It turns out that this variable reward that he mentions is the key. Let's take email as a simple example. When you check your email you never know exactly what you are going to find. It may be an empty inbox, or a wedding invite, or a job offer, or a job application rejection. The fact that the reward, or lack of, is random and variable makes the process compelling and addictive. The same applies for most social media services, games, and phone apps. The makers of these products deliberately make the fleeting rewards they offer random and variable because they know that is the best way to get you hooked.

How do they know this? To find that out we need to go back to the 1950s, to a time long before the internet and smartphones were even thought of. Back then, a psychologist named B.F. Skinner experimented using mice to work out how best to reward students to help improve their educational results. He taught mice to tap on a lever to receive a reward of food. For one group of mice he provided exactly the same amount of food at exactly the same intervals. For a second group he provided random-sized rewards at random intervals. This second group became obsessed with tapping the lever, and did so compulsively long after all rewards had ceased. It turns out that humans exhibit exactly the same behaviour, and technology companies take maximum advantage of this.²

Who is ruling our life?

Now, these may just sound like some interesting facts, but there is an absolutely fascinating link here that I think we all need to take the time to ponder. If mice exhibit the same behaviour towards the addictive and distracting nature of variable rewards as we, which part of our mind do you think is responsible for it? Scripturally speaking, we have two

² <https://www.nirandfar.com/want-to-hook-your-users-drive-them-crazy/> (Retrieved 23/5/2020), quoting from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reinforcement#Schedules_of_reinforcement

The threats of technology to our faith

minds: a carnal and a spiritual. I am pretty certain that mice do not have a spiritual mind, which leads to only one conclusion. Our obsessive and distracted use of our smart devices is driven entirely by our carnal mind. Remember Kolker's quote: "Distraction is the devil in your ear"? In Genesis 1:26, God said that He wants man to have dominion over the animals, which that we should have dominion over the carnal mind. If we are constantly distracted by our devices, then which mind is having dominion?

The psychologist Nir Eyal has some interesting thoughts in his book, *Indistractable*, about the distractions of technology. He notes that, although modern technologies provide an easily accessible distraction, the underlying issue is that we want to be distracted, particularly if the thing we are trying to do, or the thoughts we are dealing with are painful. A large part of distraction is an attempt to escape something painful on our part.

Along the same lines, Kolker also states that:

We are distracted because we want to be. Because it is fun, and it obfuscates real life. (Kolker, "Attention Must Be Paid", 2014.)

Maybe we struggle with deep reading and meditation on the Word because that time of quietness is when all our inner anxieties about our unworthiness, our failures, and our past hurts, come to the surface. Mindless use of technology—for example, binging on funny YouTube videos—is an easy distraction from our own thoughts, and provides an escape from our internal demons. If we just remove technology from our lives and don't examine our underlying motives for needing distraction, then we will just find another way of escape, which may be even worse (Matt. 12:43-45).

Now, for those in the world that have nothing better to do with their time anyway, all of this is not really a problem. For those of us that are wanting to develop the mind of Christ, however, does checking our smartphones every minute or two during a time of study and meditation help or hinder this process? Is that small piece of plastic and glass in our pocket or handbag our slave or our master (Matt. 6:24)?

Suggested antidotes to this threat

As Scripture says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God". If modern technology is inhibiting our ability to take in and meditate on the Word, then surely it has the potential to be a serious threat to our faith. So, what are some possible ways to combat this threat?

1. **Devote specific time to undistracted reading** of the Word, the works of the Truth, and for meditation. When you are reading, put your devices in another room. If you still want the convenience of ebooks, buy a Kindle or another brand of e-reader that can be used for nothing other than reading. If you need to start with small steps, then the Pomodoro Technique is a good way to get back into undistracted reading. Put a timer on for 25 minutes, and read without distraction until the timer goes off. Then spend five minutes doing whatever pointless distracting things you want. Then put the time on for another 25 minutes for another stint of undistracted reading.
2. **Acknowledge and accept whatever it is that prevents you** from seeking quiet time with the Word and with God, and that drives your need for distraction. If you don't, then any attempts to remove the distractions of technology will more than

likely be replaced by another distraction. This is the toughest thing to work on, but probably the most important.

2. Building each other up

One of the key reasons we have ecclesias is so we can come together around the Word and build each other up in the Faith. Face-to-face communication is obviously the best way to do this, but there are times when things need to be dealt with at a distance. Paul often longed to be present with an ecclesia (1 Thessalonians 2:17), but also had to resort to communicating via letters, even to discuss very difficult issues (2 Corinthians 7:8). For some reason, though, online communication seems to provide an all-too-easy forum to pull down rather than to lift up.

The phenomenon of virtual personalities

If you have had the misfortune to read some of the online Christadelphian discussion forums, you will know what I mean. All too often, brotherly love, care, and concern, is replaced by promotion of one's own opinions and the character assassination of others. This isn't unique to Christadelphians. The psychologist Elias Aboujaoude identifies these very issues. He notes that:

The way we see and evaluate ourselves is changing as a function of new personality traits born and nurtured in the virtual world. These include an exaggerated sense of our abilities, a superior attitude toward others, a new moral code that we adopt online, a proneness to impulsive behavior, and a tendency to regress to childlike states when faced with an open browser. (Aboujaoude, *Virtually You*, Kindle loc: 58)

He goes on to say:

The totality of my experience as a psychiatrist treating internet-related disorders and as a researcher has convinced me that fundamental psychological shifts are occurring within us as we spend time online or using related digital media. These shifts unfold spontaneously, almost naturally—nobody “teaches” us to become more daring or less diplomatic over e-mail; it just happens. (Kindle loc: 202)

We all have less inhibitions online and act out more frequently and more intensely than we would “in person.” The normal brake system, which under usual circumstances helps keep thoughts and behaviors in check, constantly malfunctions on the information superhighway. This chronic malfunction has been called the “online disinhibition effect.” (Kindle loc: 472)

The Internet makes it easier to suspend ethical codes governing conduct and behavior. Gentleness, common courtesy, and the little niceties that announce us as well-mannered, civilized, and sociable members of the species are quickly stripped away to reveal a completely naked, often unpleasant human being. (Kindle loc: 1,322)

Protected by anonymity, bound only by how quickly they can type the next insult, members of online communities often feel empowered to engage in cruel

The threats of technology to our faith

outbursts that would violate their sense of decency in the real world. (Kindle loc: 1,359)

Some of you may be lucky enough to have never experienced this sort of behaviour online, and that is great. For those of you that have, when you do see it, what does it do for your faith? Does it build you up to see your brethren behaving in ways that you know are totally inappropriate? When you behave the same way, what is it doing for the faith of your brethren who are on the receiving end of it?

Some of it has to do with the separation of the written language from the verbal queues. According to some experiments led by Justin Kruger at New York University's Leonard N. Stern School of Business e-mail communication, which by definition lacks "the benefit of paralinguistic cues such as gestures, emphasis, and intonation," is more easily misunderstood than verbal communication, especially when users are trying to express subtleties like sarcasm and humour. The results, published in 2005 in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, strongly suggest that people are "overconfident in their ability to communicate sarcasm, seriousness, anger, and sadness over e-mail."

The virtual personality is less mature

The issue can be further exacerbated by the abbreviated language of the Net. Aboujaoude also notes in his book:

Netspeak and textspeak, in their lack of any serious editing and their focus on speed before any other consideration and symbols that are open to interpretation ... defy the rational, "aware" mind and cannot be considered an "integral part" of our personality as we have always known it. (Aboujaoude, *Virtually You*. Kindle loc: 2,296.)

A language that is both impoverished and childlike runs the risk of encouraging impoverished and childlike behaviors, as many people seem to retreat to the virtual world to play, throw a tantrum, or be lazy, rather than to be proactive or work toward a purposeful goal. (Kindle loc: 2,311)

So, how can we avoid pulling each other down in our use of technology to communicate with each other?

1. **Wait before sending.** When you are tempted to fire off what you feel is the perfect retort to someone else's question or comment, instead imagine you are the Apostle Paul writing a response to Corinth. Parchment wasn't that easy to come by, so it was best to take some time to think about what you were going to write before starting in those days. Do the same, and once you have thought about it, type up your response in a text editor instead of in your email, or online forum software. Save the file and leave it for a couple of hours at least, preferably a day. When you come back, take the time to reread it slowly. Also, ask the Father in prayer if it is the right thing to say, and the right way to say it. If you still think it is the best way to respond, go ahead and send it. You will probably find however that 98% of the things you type into that text file will never get sent, and your brethren will most likely be the better off for it.
2. **Talk in person wherever possible.** Face to face discussion is by far the most effective means of communication, especially when it comes to discussing difficult

subjects. The Arranging Brethren in our ecclesia came to this conclusion a few years ago. Some email discussions started going around in circles, with discussion getting more heated as it went on. Once we actually came together, and people could see all of the associated visual cues, the debate was quickly resolved. We now have a policy of only discussing very simple matters of arrangement via email, and all other discussion is deferred until a face to face meeting can be arranged. It can be all too easy to use text or email as a way to escape having a difficult face to face discussion, but trust me, I know from bitter personal experience that you will invariably make the situation worse if you don't manage it in person.

3. If the situation is on a discussion forum with brethren on the other side of the world, and you can't meet with them face to face, then just **walk away from the discussion**. In all likelihood the only thing driving your desire to contribute is your ego telling you that you have the perfect answer to the argument. In all reality your contribution is unlikely to achieve anything of lasting value. Walk away, and instead spend the time talking in person with somebody in your ecclesia who is in need of some company.

3. Remaining separate

There are numerous warnings in Scripture that we should be separate from the world in order to remain holy, for our God is holy. For example, in Leviticus 20:26, "And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine".

What could be worse than television?

In years gone by, many Christadelphians resisted having a television because this was seen as bringing the world into your home. In contrast, the internet, and smartphones, which offer us far more of the world than television ever did, have made their way into most of our homes with no resistance at all. The main reason for this, I think, is that television was just a single-use entertainment device. It was easy to see that we had no real justifiable need for it. The internet and smartphones, on the other hand, have multiple uses, many of which are perfectly valid, such as online banking. This has made it much easier to justify the use of these devices.

I am not going to suggest that we must throw away our smartphones and disconnect the internet, because they have become an almost integral part of life in the 21st century. We do, however, need to make sure that we are all 100% aware of the dangers that come with these tools: they provide easy access to the most debased things that the world has to offer. Because of the potentially mixed audience reading this I am going to talk in slightly couched language, but you will know what I am referring to.

Temptation such as is common to man—but made easier

The worldly corruption that the internet opens up to us is nothing new. When Balaam was unable to curse the Israelites on the plains of Moab, Israel managed to curse themselves by falling prey to the temptation of the Moabite women. David, a man after God's own heart, fell prey to the lust of the eyes. Our Corinthian brethren had temptation paraded before

The threats of technology to our faith

them on a daily basis when the temple prostitutes marched through the city. The temptation we face is different in only one, subtle, way. We are enabled to commit the sin of the lust of the eyes in secrecy. The Israelites on the plains of Moab did those things in plain sight of their brethren. The Corinthians risked being seen by their brethren on the walk up to the temple of Aphrodite. We, however, can gaze upon all that the world has to offer in the privacy of our own home or any nook or cranny, or even on a bus, and nobody will ever know ... or will they?

The issue is that temptation is everywhere when we go online. The world specifically uses the lust of the eyes to tempt us with every click. The images and the words they use are specifically designed to tempt us into clicking on that link. Unfortunately, with human nature, it is a slippery slope, and once we are tempted to look at one thing, the flesh wants more, and it is never satisfied with more of the same—it wants to pull us down lower and lower. And the flesh is deceptive. It is easy to fool ourselves with thoughts about how we are not really doing anything wrong, we are only looking. But it is impossible to look upon these things without having related thoughts. Christ shows the folly of thinking that only actions matter: "...I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

What should we do?

Some of you might be thinking, "how could brethren possibly justify watching the unclean things of this world on their phones or laptops?" Before you judge and condemn them, remember, as mentioned already, David, a man after God's own heart fell after the same manner. Brethren trapped in this sin need help, love, and compassion, not our judgement.

If some of you reading this struggle in private with this problem, before you condemn yourself as somehow less worthy than your brethren, remember that 'all have sinned and fallen short'; we are all unworthy. Also, know that "no temptation [hath] taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"(1 Cor. 10:13). If you struggle with this problem, don't draw away from God; you need to draw near to God and pray for Him to show you that way of escape. It may not be easy, though, so you may also need to seek out someone with a sound knowledge in the Word and life experience, someone you trust, to pray with you and help you through this. A lot of professionals in the world see this as an addiction much the same as alcohol and drugs.

As ecclesias, we ought not to be naive about this. We need to be prepared to help brethren that may be struggling in this area, and help them in a compassionate, caring, and non-judgemental way (James 5:14–16).

Suggested antidotes to this threat

So, if getting rid of your internet connection and smartphones are not an option for you, how can you help protect your faith, and the faith of your family against this problem? Well, I did an exhortation recently about the time when Sennacherib came up against Jerusalem, and I was amazed at the various steps that Hezekiah took to prepare the city (2 Chron 32). Previously, if you had asked me, I would have said that Hezekiah prayed to God, and God saved the city. But when you look closely, as well as putting his trust in God, he also took some very deliberate steps to prepare the city as best he could. Sennacherib is an analogy

The threats of technology to our faith

of our sinful nature, so, all of the steps Hezekiah took provide a fantastic analogy of how we can prepare for the temptations that come upon us. Two of the steps he took are very applicable to this particular issue:

1. **He stopped the water supplies outside the city.** He and his men went around and blocked up all the springs outside the city walls so that when the Assyrians arrived, they would have nothing to drink. Paul has a wonderful quote in Romans 13:14: “make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” If we have a problem with temptation, and we are in a room by ourselves with a smartphone and an unfiltered internet connection, then we are making provision for the flesh. Will power alone is not going to stop us from falling. If we have to be in a room by ourselves, then maybe our phone and our laptop should be in a different room. Also, an easy way of blocking off the “water” supply is to install some sort of filtering on our home network, and all our family devices, so at least we don’t have an open firehouse of all the world has to offer. If you have children, then you owe it to them as part of your duty of care to do your best to shield them from this content.
2. **He built up the defences.** We could potentially say that adding a filter to your internet is building up the defences—and it is something we can do—but I am going to suggest that our best defence is our conscience. No internet filter is 100% foolproof, and you or your children are always going to find times when you are outside of the family’s defences, and you need to make your own decisions about what you should or shouldn’t look at. Conscience is the only thing that will really help. We need to have personal conviction, based on our faith, that we want to remain separate from those things because we love our God. We need to consider them to be the same unclean abomination that our Heavenly Father sees.

Conclusion

I think it is clear that technology can be a threat to our faith in at least three key ways:

1. It diminishes our ability to think deeply on God’s Word,
2. It provides a medium where we find it all too easy to pull each other down, and
3. It puts the worst that the world has to offer at our fingertips

As ecclesias, I think we have been too slow to recognise these issues, and to help each other fight against them. Together, we can start to combat these threats to our faith with seven simple steps:

1. Devote specific time to undistracted reading of the Word and the works of the Truth, and to meditation.
2. Acknowledge and accept whatever it is that prevents you from seeking quiet time with the Word and with God, and that drives your need for distraction.
3. Wait and consider before sending online communications to your brethren.
4. Talk in person wherever possible.
5. Make no provision for the flesh by limiting your access.

The threats of technology to our faith

6. Build up your defences by developing your conscience,
... and the seventh step which I haven't mentioned so far:

7. Be honest with each other about the temptations we face in our age, admit when we are personally struggling, and be willing with meekness and humility to help those that also struggle.

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