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# 12 WAYS YOUR PHONE IS CHANGING YOU

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*Tony Reinke*

“The Vacation” | Wendell Berry

What’s the big picture?

*EQUIP*

*What is our aim in life? What are we called to?*

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*The critical question:*



*AJ Babel, December 2020  
Christ Community Church*

# Is this about smartphones? Social media? Our hearts?

**Bigger than** phones, social media.

Your heart

All of your life

**BUT... Not less than** phones, social media.

Phones/social matters

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*<sup>43</sup>“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit,<sup>44</sup> for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.<sup>45</sup> The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”*

*Luke 6:43-45*

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*“This book fails if, having read it, you only hate yourself more (or your phone); it succeeds only if you enjoy Christ more.” (23)*

## Critical Engagement

*“Self-criticism in the digital age is a necessary discipline – an act of courage... Our bondage to technology is measured by our inability to thoughtfully criticize ourselves.” (194)*

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*<sup>12</sup>“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything...*

*<sup>23</sup>“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up.<sup>24</sup> Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.*

*1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23-24*

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1. Is it allowed?
2. Is this helpful, beneficial?
3. Am I in control? Or am I being dominated?
4. Does it build others up? Is this for the good of my neighbor?

*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.*

*So glorify God in your body.*

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20*

## A Note on Satan's Strategy (190-192)

### Direct, Blatant, Plain

Obvious sin

### Indirect, Covert, Sneaky

Distraction – Get your eye off the ball

Occupy your mind, heart, life

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*"I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought nor what I liked."*

C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*

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## Self-Survey

Do my smartphone (& social media) habits...

*Adapted from p. 52, 194*

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|---|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Reveal a compulsive desire to be seen and affirmed?  | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 2. Distract me from genuine communion with God?   | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 3. Provide an easy escape from sobered thinking about my death, Christ's return, & eternal realities? | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 4. Preoccupy me with the pursuit of worldly success?  | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 5. Mute the sporadic leading of God's Spirit in my life?  | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 6. Preoccupy me with dating and romance?  | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 7. Disengage me from the needs of the neighbors God has placed right in front of me?                  | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 8. Distract me becoming more enamored with God, his glory, and his glorious creation?                 | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 9. Lead me toward loneliness?   | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 10. Keep me from treasuring God's wisdom?   | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 11. Cultivate an ongoing sense of FOMO (fear of missing out)?   | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 12. Reveal a "more harsh me" than how I treat people in person?                                       | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 13. Build up Christians and my local church?  | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |
| 14. Center on what is necessary to me and beneficial to others?                                       | <i>Not at all</i> | <i>A little</i> | <i>More than I would like</i> | <i>Definitely</i> |

## The 12 Ways

*Our phones tend to...*

*So we must cultivate these Godly disciplines*

- 1) Amplify our addiction to distractions → Minimize unnecessary distractions in life to hear from God
- 2) Push us to evade the limits of embodiment → Embrace our flesh-and-blood embodiment
- 3) Feed our craving for immediate approval → Aim at God's ultimate approval
- 4) Undermine key literary skills → Treasure the gift of literacy
- 5) Offer us a buffet of produced media → Listen to God's voice in creation
- 6) Overtake and distort our identity → Treasure Christ to be molded into his image
- 7) Tempt us toward unhealthy isolation and loneliness → Seek to serve the legitimate needs of our neighbors
- 8) Tempt us to indulge in visual vices → Find A fountain of delight in the unseen Christ
- 9) Make it increasingly difficult for us to identify ultimate meaning → Prioritize God's Word
- 10) Promise to hedge against our fear of missing out → We have no ultimate regrets to fear
- 11) Cause us to treat one another harshly → Handle one another with grace and gentleness
- 12) Splinter our perception of our place in time → Find our place in God's unfolding history

See pages 189-190.



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## Discussion & Critical Engagement

1. “What I am coming to understand is that this impulse to pull the lever of a random slot machine of viral content is the age-old tactic of Satan. C.S. Lewis called it the ‘Nothing’ strategy in his *Screwtape Letters*.” (191) The man who succumbs to this temptation later says: “I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought now what I liked.” (*Screwtape Letters*) Missionary William Carey put it this way: “I’m not afraid of failure. I’m afraid of succeeding at things that don’t matter.”
  - a. *Discuss these thoughts in the realm of our phones & social media.*
2. The center of the book (chapters 6-7) suggest that our phones often tend to lure us back from both 1) Loving God & 2) Loving Neighbor.
  - a. *In what ways do you agree or disagree with this? How do you see it show up in your & others’ lives?*
  - b. *What are we to do with this knowledge?*
3. John Piper suggests on page 144 that our battle with our phones has an external front & an internal front. Externally, “are we safeguarding ourselves and practicing smartphone self-denial?” Internally, “Are we simultaneously seeking to satisfy our hearts with divine glory that is, for now, largely invisible?”
  - a. *Do you agree about the internal & external nature of the battle?*
  - b. *Why do we need to see both sides of this? And what happens if we act as if there is only an external side? Or only an internal side?*

4. On page 195 in the Conclusion: “For all of us, the challenge is in extending grace to one another. Technophobic pride says, ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like this gadget addict who is distracted by his devices and feeding on the banal trivialities of the fake world.’ Technophilic pride says, ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like this tech despiser who is too undisciplined to manage the digital distractions of the real world.’ Both views are arrogant.”
  - a. *What is wrong and/or arrogant about both positions?*
  - b. *How do both positions fail to align with a Biblical & Gospel-informed worldview? What are they missing?*
5. Here’s a summary of much of the Epilogue: In the face of the glory of Christ, now through faith and later through wide-open eyes, and the glorious new creation which awaits us, the smartphone loses some of its dazzle and is seen as fading into obsolescence. In view of the glory of God, we are *freed* to see our smartphones as tools from our Creator for which we ought to *thank* Him. We can then steward these tools to glorify Him, be in awe of Him, love Him, and love our neighbor.
  - a. *Discuss*
6. “We retreat into our phones – projecting our scorn for complex situations or for boring people. In both cases, when we grab our phones, we air our sense of superiority to others – often without knowing it.” (44)
  - a. *Discuss*

### *Additional Question for Critical Engagement*

1. In chapter 1, Reinke suggests that our phones tend to distract us from: 1) Work & duty, 2) Loving the people around us, & 3) Loving the Lord & 4) Meditating on ourselves & eternity.
  - a. *How do you see this tendency in your life? And what can we do about this challenge?*
2. Chapter 2: “We sin with our phones when we ignore our street neighbors, the strangers who share with us the same track of pavement.” (58) Reinke also points out that anger, wrath, and slander go *much more viral* online than do things like joy & compliments.
  - a. *How do you feel this pull toward a “disembodied” life online? And why is it no real substitute for embodied relationships?*
  - b. *What biblically ought to drive us toward a more “embodied life” with those around us?*
3. Chapter 3 highlights are craving for approval & affirmation online. “But our online attention proves to be an incapable substitute for true intimacy, and the addiction to a crafted online image renders true intimacy impossible.” (69)
  - a. *Why is this online attention “an incapable substitute” for true intimacy, validation, and approval? How do you see this lure in your life?*
4. Chapter 4... “In their own ways, all of our social media compete for more and more of our attention, at the cost of the sustained focus we need to read books.” (82)... “‘Distractability might be regarded as the mental equivalent of obesity.’ Without the ability to focus our minds, our attention is led by others, and we are easily captured by ‘the omnipresent purveyors of marshmallows’ – the alluring distractions on our phones. Crawford asks, “What sort of outlier would you have to be, what sort of freak of self-control, to resist those well-engineered cultural marshmallows?”. (83)
  - a. *How do you see this crippling of our ability read (and enjoy) books? And why is that a bad thing from a biblical perspective?*

5. Chapter 5 lays out that everything we see online is “produced” and designed by this multi-billion-dollar business to “wow and lure” us. We are fish in a pond. As some have said, “If it’s free... you are the product!”
  - a. *How does this idea challenge you to critically think about your phone and social media habits?*
  
6. In chapter 6, Reinke states that “when we talk about ‘smartphone addiction’, often what we are talking about is the addiction of looking at ourselves.” (110) Our smartphone usage revolves around finding/securing our identity as well as worshipping that identity of “what we want to become.”
  - a. *How does an endless search for identity (via our smartphones & social media) proved detrimental to ourselves as well as the world around us?*
  
7. Chapter 7: Reinke states, “The smartphone is causing a social reversal: the desire to be alone in public and never alone in seclusion.” (124)
  - a. *What does this mean and how do you see this play out?*
  - b. *Why is seclusion, solitude, and silence actually good & necessary for us?*
  - c. *Does your smartphone usage make you more or less lonely?*
  
8. Chapter 8 claims that smartphones deceive us into thinking we can do things in secret. But “our Creator is no respecter of privacy laws. His omnipresence shatters the mirage of anonymity that drives so many people to turn to their phones and assume they can sin and indulge without consequence.” (137) “Nothing you do on your phone is secret... Our browsing history can be washed clean only with the blood of Christ.” (138)
  - a. *Why does the feeling of anonymity enable so many people to do things they wouldn’t dare do if it were publicly known? What does this reveal about our hearts?*



9. Chapter 9 focuses on our loss of meaning & purpose amidst the flurry of information & the constant barrage what's "new & relevant." "In our desire to 'master' the world, we are especially susceptible to novelty and prompts – we get texts, read tweets, or see notifications on our phones, and everything in our lives must stop." (149)
  - a. *How does this constant stream tend to disconnect us from ultimate meaning & timeless wisdom?*
10. Chapter 10: FOMO. Our fear of missing out produces anxiety and stirs up our envy. We fear what people think of us, we are anxious about not being connected or in the know, and we envy what we see in others' lives.
  - a. *Why are these temptations especially intensified by social media & smartphones?*
  - b. *How does Philippians 3:8 help our hearts which are so prone to FOMO & envy?*
11. Chapter 11: "While there are many 'one anothers' in the Bible, 'compare one another' is not one of them, and yet this is the direction we tilt online." (163) R. Kent Hughes adds that we ought to especially be watchful of slandering others online: "Thus, many believers use truth as a license to righteously diminish others' reputations.", (167)
  - a. **Why is "truth" not a license for passing along a bad report?**
  - b. **And why does social media tend to tempt us even more than face-to-face interaction toward comparison?**
12. Chapter 12 suggests that the fragmented nature of social media & smartphone usage causes us to lose our place in time & history. "We become content to 'LOL' with out thumbs or to cry emoticon tears to express our sorrow because we cannot (and will not) take the time to genuinely invest ourselves in real tears of sorrow." (179)
  - a. *Why do our phones & social media draw us away from our place in actual time/space? How do they lure us away from genuinely investing in actual relationships?*

## Self-Survey

### Do my smartphone behaviors...

1. Move me toward God or away from him? (Ends)

*Away from God* ← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 → *Toward God*

2. Edify me and others, or do they build nothing of lasting value? (Influence)

*No value* ← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 → *Build up*

3. Expose my freedom in Christ or my bondage? (Servitude)

*Reveal bondage* ← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 → *Show freedom*

### Overall...

4. Which (1-3) of the areas we have touched on hit “closest to home”?
5. What steps ought you to take? And what steps are you considering taking? (Write these down now – most of us will find that we are quite adept at rationalizing why we don’t need to do these things as we get further from this discussion)

### Should I ditch my smartphone?

- If you can’t seriously ask yourself this question, it may be a signpost of your *bondage*. Ability & willingness to engage in self-criticism is a signpost of freedom; without it, you are in bondage – and you may not even know it!
- Read the Conclusion & thoughtfully consider his thoughts. Think through the questions he gives; talk through them with a trusted friend.
- **Any boundaries?** Consider the 12 boundaries he suggests on page 200.
- **Consider “testing yourself”** with a trial or probationary period of time