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THE WINE PRESS



Pressing into Truth, Pouring out His Grace

August 2025

Fighting for Focus in a Distracted World

We live in a time where distraction is always one swipe away. Our days are filled with endless scrolls, constant notifications, and subtle pressures to stay connected—but often at the cost of our connection with Jesus. It's easy to lose hours to entertainment, news, or online chatter and find ourselves spiritually dry, wondering why the Lord feels distant.

In this month's issue we're diving into what it looks like to guard our attention, reclaim our time, and make room for the only relationship that truly satisfies: our daily walk with the Lord.

The good news? Jesus is still near. Still speaking. Still inviting us into a deeper fellowship with Him through His Word. No matter how noisy life gets, His voice cuts through the clutter—if we're willing to listen. Whether you're feeling overwhelmed or just hungry for more of Jesus, He can help us refocus, re-center, and rediscover the joy of abiding in Him.

The Wine Press is a thoughtfully curated collection of articles from across the web, compiled to inspire, encourage, and deepen your walk with our King and Savior, Jesus Christ. All articles remain the property of their respective authors to whom we joyfully give full credit and our appreciation for sharing their wisdom and experiences with us. May these words uplift your spirit, strengthen your faith, and draw you into ever deeper communion with the God of all grace.

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Silence in a World Full of Noise

By Mark Batterson

Seventeenth-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal once observed, “The sole cause of man’s unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room.”

If our problems are hearing problems, then the solution to those problems is a prescription that is as old as the psalms. It’s so critical to our spiritual vitality that it’s worth meditating on one word or phrase at a time:

Be.

Be still.

Be still, and know.

Be still, and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10).

Have you ever tried to quiet a loud room? Attempting to yell above the crowd usually doesn’t work, does it? It’s far more effective to shush the crowd with a shhhh. That’s the method God employs. His whisper quiets us, calms us, stills us.

By definition, white noise is a sound that contains every frequency a human can hear. And because it contains every frequency, it’s very difficult to hear any specific frequency, especially the still small voice of God. As such, chronic noise may be the greatest impediment to our spiritual growth.

When our lives get loud, with noise filling every frequency, we lose our sense of being. We run the risk of turning into human doings rather than human beings. And when our schedules get busy, we lose our sense of balance, which is a function

of the inner ear.

Can I go out on a limb?

Your life is too loud.

Your schedule is too busy.

That’s how and why and when we forget that God is God. And it takes very little to distract us. “I neglect God and His angels, for the noise of a fly,” said the poet John Donne. The solution? Stillness. Or more specifically, His still, small voice.

Silence is anything but passive waiting. It’s proactive listening. Noted author Henri Nouwen believed that silence was an act of war against the competing voices within us. And that war isn’t easily won because it’s a daily battle. But each day God’s voice gets a little louder in our lives until He’s all we can hear. He wrote, “Every time you listen with great attentiveness to the voice that calls you the Beloved, you will discover within you a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply.”

The quietest room in the world is the anechoic chamber at Orfield Laboratories in Minneapolis. One-foot-thick concrete walls and three-foot-thick fiberglass acoustic wedges absorb 99.99 percent of sound. Background noise measures -9.4 decibels. All you hear in an anechoic chamber is the sound of your heart beating, blood circulating and lungs breathing. That’s the sound of silence, and it reminds us that it’s in God that “we live and move and have our being”(Acts 17:28).

If you want to hear the heart of God,

silence is key.

If you want the Spirit of God to fill you, be still.

The psalmists didn't have an anechoic chamber to retreat to, so they retreated to God. They referred to Him as their refuge, their fortress and their ever-present help in time of need. They spoke of the "shelter of the Most High" and the "shadow of the Almighty." But my favorite descriptor might be the "hiding place."

You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance (Psalms 32:7).

Did you know that God is singing songs of deliverance all around you all the time? You can't hear them because they're outside your range of hearing, but you're surrounded by a sonic shield. Those songs of deliverance are powerful enough to break

any bondage, overcome any addiction and solve any problem. Those songs are the reason no weapon formed against you will prosper. (see Isaiah 54:17)

The voice can reproduce only what the ear can hear. I'm not sure what problem you need to solve or what issue you need to resolve, but my prayer is that you'll learn to discern His voice. When you do, His songs of deliverance can set you free!

Quit hiding from God.

Hide yourself in Him.

Read the article here:

<https://relevantmagazine.com/faith/mark-batterson-silence-in-a-world-full-of-noise/>

Be Still and Know

In the clamor of the world,
when noise is all around,
a whisper breaks the chaos—
a silence that is sound.

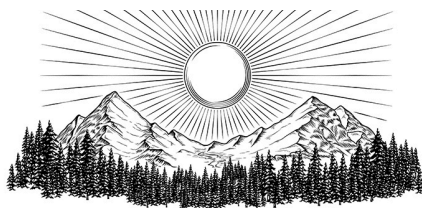
Be still, the Spirit calls you,
let striving cease and rest,
for in the hush of quiet,
your soul will be refreshed.

No need to chase the answers,
no rush to understand,
just trust the One who holds you
with everlasting hands.

He speaks not through the thunder,
but in the softest breath—
a voice that calms the tempest,
a peace that conquers death.

So still your heart before Him,
let every worry fade,
and know that He is sovereign—
your refuge, strength, and aid.

- Anonymous



Authentic Intimacy in a World of A.I.

By Dennis Henderson

Technology is moving at a breakneck pace, reshaping how we communicate, work, live, and worship. The buzzword that has come into our conversations and everyday life is AI. I asked ChatGPT to give me a short definition of AI:

“AI (Artificial Intelligence) is the simulation of human intelligence in machines, allowing them to learn from data, recognize patterns, solve problems, and make decisions with minimal human intervention.”

We are surrounded by and use AI daily without realizing it. It can track every stroke of our computer use. As I have thought about AI, social media, and our digital world, a term has come to mind recently, arising from my experiences and observations in both public settings and my personal life. It does not originate from a critical or negative standpoint, but rather, from a heart that genuinely seeks the face of God. We might define worship in many ways, such as recognizing that God deserves praise, bowing before Him, and giving Him our attention. However, I like to define worship as intimacy with God. The core of our relationship with God is intimacy. My wrestling brings me to the possibility that we have unintentionally created our own AI in the American church. Could it be that we have sometimes embraced an Artificial Intimacy?

Over my 58 years of ministry, I wanted

to lead my churches to be relevant and impactful. However, as we move at a dizzying pace trying to keep up with this ever-changing world, I wonder if we have exchanged genuine intimacy for Artificial Intimacy, which depends on an emotional high, stimulated by sound and lighting technology and gifted musicians. Do we depend on technology—or simply use technology? There is a thin line between being entertained and emotionally moved and true worship that changes us to be more like Christ. Could the American church thrive without all the props of technology?

I think of the biographies of many pastors and believers from before our time—even a few centuries back—who led lives marked by deep solitude, reflection, and devotion. Their practices centered on prayer, Scripture study, and pastoral care, often carried out in quiet isolation instead of fast-paced strategy meetings, consumer-driven planning, and the desire to be attractive. Their role was demanding, requiring both spiritual devotion and practical resilience, yet their work laid the foundation for the spiritual and moral fabric of many communities. They desired spiritual awakening rather than relevant attraction.

Amid all my questions about the corporate church, I have been convicted to examine my own intimacy. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus said, “But the hour is coming, and is now here when the true



worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23-24). This brings to mind a second AI term: Authentic Intimacy. I believe that Authentic Intimacy always begins with seeking God’s face. Psalm 27:4 says, “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.” Seeking His face is not stimulated by emotion and does not require an emotional foundation. In fact, I have learned that my emotions can come as a byproduct.

As I ponder Authentic Intimacy, I do not have all the answers. I feel like I’m grasping at straws trying to define a better AI, but here are some thoughts I try to dwell on in my desire for Authentic Intimacy:

1. As seen in Isaiah 6, intimacy begins with awe of the holiness of God and the response of neediness and confession of sinfulness, with Isaiah crying out, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”

2. It is based on the pure truth of the

Word of God. “Sanctify them in the truth [set them apart for Your purposes, make them holy]; Your word is truth” (John 17:17, AMP).

3. It is worship with a surrendered heart to His Kingdom. “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). “And the Lord said: ‘Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me’” (Isaiah 29:13).

4. It is worship that transforms us, not just moves our emotions. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

5. It is not limited to a Sunday service—it is a lifestyle. Authentic Intimacy is daily and throughout the day as we work and interact with others. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col. 3:16-17).

6. The goal of Authentic Intimacy is to glorify the one who deserves the glory, and for His Kingdom to rule in our lives. As has been said many times in our world of Strategic Renewal, “He is worthy; we are needy!”

I have always desired for the church to grow, but as I strive to have Authentic Intimacy in the church and in my own life, I believe that we must examine our hearts for Authentic Intimacy and beware of Artificial Intimacy in a world of Artificial Intelligence.

<https://www.strategicrenewal.com/authentic-intimacy-in-a-world-of-artificial-intelligence/>

The Battle for Your Time

By Dino Ambrosi

If you're eighteen years old right now, optimistically, if you live to be 90 years old, you have 864 months left. About a third of that time will be spent sleeping. On average, 126 of those months will go to schooling and career development. About eighteen months will be spent driving, thirty-six cooking and eating, another thirty-six on chores and errands, and about twenty-seven in the bathroom and on personal hygiene. That leaves you with approximately 334 months—optimistically—for everything else.

This is where you tick off the boxes on your bucket list. This is where you pursue your passions, travel the world, and leave your mark. How you spend this time will determine the quality of your life. But it's important to remember: this time isn't just something you spend—it's something you invest. What you do with it will quite literally shape the person you become. Your future body, mind, and character are actively cultivated by how you choose to use your time today.

So take a moment and ask yourself: What do you want to do with that free time? What haven't you done but want to? Who do you want to spend it with? What is worth investing in?

I'd wager that scrolling through TikTok, binge-watching Netflix, and playing video games didn't come to mind. Yet today, the average eighteen-year-old in

the United States will spend 93 % of their remaining free time looking at screens—not counting time spent in school. Let that sink in.

Imagine getting to ninety and looking back at this visualization of how you spent your life after eighteen—and reflecting on all the things you could have done but didn't because you were distracted. Ask yourself: what would twenty-six years of screen time do to you? What does that amount of time invested in screens make you?

It's well established that high screen time correlates with depression and anxiety. But only recently have we begun to reveal the cognitive consequences of excessive tech use. Every time we stare at screens, we switch between bite-sized fragments of information. TikToks average about fifteen seconds. Over 55 % of webpages are viewed for fifteen seconds or less. If you switch attention every fifteen seconds for an average of eight hours and thirty-nine minutes a day, you are training yourself to be chronically distracted. Think about what that does to your career, relationships, and your ability to focus on what truly matters.

I've never shared this with anyone who actually wants to spend 93 % of their free time in front of a screen. There's a stark difference between how much time we say our screens are worth and how much

we give them—and that isn’t accidental. It’s by design.

Social media is free because you are the product. These companies monetize you by collecting data, predicting behaviors, and selling that attention to advertisers. To do that, they must: (1) gather as much data as possible, and (2) show you as many ads as they can. Their profit grows with your scroll time. Every platform is in fierce competition to capture more of your free hours.

So let’s run a thought experiment: How much would you pay to use your favorite social media platform if it had a monthly subscription fee? Think of the one you use most. Raise your hand if you’d pay at least five dollars a month. Ten? Twenty? Now, I don’t see any hands.

Let’s calculate: if you value your time at \$20/hr, and you spend two hours a day on TikTok, that’s \$1,200 per month—effectively. Most of us are drastically

over-paying for social media.

My challenge to you is this: figure out what a good deal with social media looks like. Start by asking:

- 1. What value do these services provide?
- 2. How much of your time is that value worth?

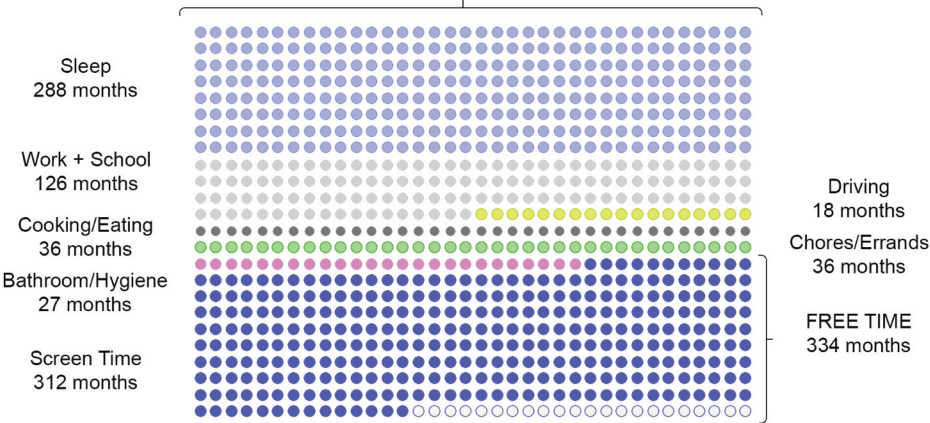
I’m not saying social media has no value—it can foster relationships, spark ideas, or ignite movements. But we must learn moderation.

Don’t reach age ninety, look back, and realize that in trying to avoid FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), you actually missed out on living. Free time is your most valuable resource. Don’t hand it away—for free.

Watch the video here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TMPXK9tw5U>

An 18 year old’s remaining time in months

Assuming 90 year life expectancy
1 row=36 months - 3 years



Get Alone Undistracted

By Tony Reinke

Never Offline

These words on a recent Time Magazine cover are intended to unnerve us with the ominous future of a techno-invasion. Computers are getting strapped around us and stuck on us, moving into our watches and our glasses, “attempting to colonize our bodies.”

Journalists Lev Grossman and Matt Vella explain in the article. “We’re used to technology being safely Other, but the Apple Watch wants to snuggle up and become part of your Self. The reality of living with an iPhone, or any smart, connected device, is that it makes reality feel just that little bit less real. One gets over-connected, to the point where the thoughts and opinions of distant anonymous strangers start to feel more urgent than those of your loved ones who are in the same room as you. One forgets how to be alone and undistracted.”

Wells: “The average person shifts tasks every three minutes. Half the time we interrupt ourselves.”

To never be alone and undistracted is especially alarming in light of the parable of the four soils where Jesus warns us of the spiritual hazards of distractions. Whether our concerns are in the next room or in the Syrian desert, life can get quickly crowded by any number of cares, anxieties and desires. The ephemeral chokes out the infinite ([Mark 4:18–19](#)).

But your wrist doesn’t need to be cuffed to an Apple Watch to feel distractions colonizing your life. The average iPhone

pings and push notifies our attention with the cares of the world in real time. The latest news and chatter can rob our focus, knock our lives off center, and drown out the voice of God.

Finding Balance

To help find healthy balance with technology, I recently sat down with two seasoned fathers in the faith: David Wells and Arthur Hunt. Wells is the author of the new book [God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-Love of God Reorients Our World](#) (2014). Hunt is the author of the new book [Surviving Technopolis: Essays on Finding Balance in Our New Man-Made Environments](#) (2013).

Both men appreciate the benefits of digital communications technology. And both of their books attempt to help Christians think critically about the place of technology and distractions in our lives. I asked these men about the iPhone — the problems it introduces into our lives, the toll on the Christian soul it potentially causes, and the solutions for wise balance it forces us to envision.

Final Descent Into Technopolis

We begin at 40,000 feet. Man has a long history with technology, reaching back to simple things like shovels and spears. Historically, technology helps our lives achieve convenience and efficiency. But over time, technology moved outside the boundaries of problem solving.

“We have reached a period in which all forms of cultural life have surrendered to the sovereignty of Technology,” warns

Arthur Hunt. “We are now under a Technopoly, which says absolutely nothing is going to stand in our way of technological progress. We put so much cultural stock in sort of headlong rush into the future without any clear telos [goal]. The only real telos is it has got to be bigger, it has got to be faster, and it has got to be newer. Somebody might ask: Well, what is wrong with this? Well, it advances the notion that our purpose in life is to be a satisfied consumer of material goods. So the next big thing is not the coming of God’s kingdom, but the coming of the curved TV screen.”

In fact Christians do have a clear telos, says David Wells. “Our objective in life is to become God-centered in our thoughts, God-fearing in our hearts and God-honoring in all that we do. This is a society of distraction. If we allow it to overwhelm us and press us into its mold, it will take time away from those things that are central: our focus upon the reality and the presence and the glory and the goodness and the greatness of God. So in that sense it becomes a real competitor.”

The aim of technology and the aim of the Christian life can easily run counter.

Pings

Wells: “Our objective in life is to become God-centered in our thoughts, God-fearing in our hearts and God-honoring in all that we do.”

“We get computer pings and beeps. We all understand this,” Wells said. “But the large question is this: What is this doing to our minds when we are living with this constant distraction? What happens to us when we are in constant motion? When, in fact, we are addicted to constant visual stimulation, what happens to us? That is the big question. The average person shifts tasks every three minutes. Half the time we interrupt ourselves! So what is this doing to us deep down? The smaller question is: How do we find time for the

things that are really central in our lives as Christians?”

These are twin problems we must address.

Part of the problem is that we get drawn in to the lie that our lives are rendered irrelevant if we fail to connect in social media every day, multiple times a day, every waking hour. “People on Facebook update their status on an hourly basis, because if they don’t, they have become obsolete,” says Wells. “But the most relevant thing in the world is what is eternal. And in that sense, the eternal is the most relevant, the most up-to-date thing that anyone could find.”

The Internet is constantly working to make us highly impatient people, Wells warns. “We want to go on to the next thing now, immediately. It cannot be too soon before we move on. But the knowledge of God, learning to walk with him through all of the conflicts, anxieties, difficulties, injustices of life — that is a life process. It takes time for this knowledge to mature in people. And we rob ourselves of that if we allow ourselves to be shaped by this culture of distraction.”

Whether we are interrupted by external beeps for notification, or interrupted by internal cravings for distraction, our minds are changing. And this gets to the most serious concerns Wells has for younger Christians. “We are losing the capacity for attention, by which I mean the ability to focus on something and to think about it. And if we lose our capacity to focus, how will God be the central organizing thing in our lives? How will we become God-centered in our thoughts, if we are fragmented in our thoughts? And how are we going to be God-honoring in our lives, if our lives are just bits and pieces of information? That is the problem.”

Now What?

These are serious problems, and not

unique to Christians. But where do we go from here? How does Scripture help us navigate these concerns? How do we protect our time and attention to focus on what is eternally relevant? Hunt and Wells offer five takeaways to help us survive life in Technopolis.

1. Count the personal costs of a device along with the benefits (Hunt). “First I think the Bible informs us to walk circumspectly with eyes wide open. To some extent I think we should be like the children of Issachar, men who understood their times ([1 Chronicles 12:32](#)). We live in a world that is constantly changing and telling us that we need this new gadget and what this new gadget will do for us. We should be asking: What is this new gadget going to do to me personally? And what is it going to do to my family, to my community, to the world?” Every gadget comes with benefits. Every gadget comes with relational costs.

2. Be the master over your technology, don’t get mastered by it (Hunt). Don’t be a passive recipient for technology, but use technology to achieve the ends of your life. “We need to be masters of our technologies and not the other way around. The consumer should not be consumed.”

3. Moderate your use (Hunt). We are not monks. Separating ourselves from technology completely is not an option for us. Thus, “we should practice the virtue of moderation, or what the Bible calls self-control. We should learn to redeem the time because the days are evil ([Ephesians 5:16](#)). Time is short, because we are going to die. Therefore, we need to make the best use of our time.” And our attention is finite and limited. Create patterns in your life to strategically withdraw from technology.

4. Hone your skill to distinguish the significant from the insignificant (Wells). “We must learn to organize our internal

world. If we don’t do that, we cannot see the distinction between things that are really weighty in life from those that are ephemeral and flashy and superficial; those that are true from those that are wrong; those that really matter from those that we can brush off. The capacity to do that is what the Bible talks about under the language of wisdom. We today might think of wisdom today as smarts. But in the Bible it is really not. It is a heart thing, the ability to see life for what it is by our knowledge of God. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, because we are seeing our lives with the rays of eternity ([Psalm 111:10](#); [Proverbs 1:7](#); [9:10](#)). When you see life in that sort of light, it looks very different from the way that life looks like on the Internet.”

5. Discipline yourself by reading books (Wells). “We need to keep exercising our minds by reading, because it exercises our minds to understand sentences and follow narratives. We need these abilities to study Scripture.”

“For the health of our soul, we must learn to get alone undistracted.”

Only in thoughtful silence can we order (or re-order) our lives by the greatest and most relevant news in the universe. “The greatest, deepest, most glorious thing that we can know is what God has revealed to us of himself in his love and his holiness,” Wells reminds us.

“Everything else pales into insignificance. If you focus on the shiny stuff that glitters for a moment, at the end of your life you will find that your hands are empty.”

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/get-alone-undistracted>

Practice Defeating Distractions

by Jon Bloom

Distraction is not defeated in a few fell blows, but by many small, habitual ones. Therefore, I will not promise to provide you in a thousand words a magical sword that can slay the Dread Dragon Distraction in three or four simple hacks. I have discovered no such sword and do not believe one exists.

What makes me any authority on distraction in the first place? Not my expertise in focus, but my expertise in being distracted. If my observations and self-assessments are accurate, I'm on the "above average" side of the distractible spectrum. I know this struggle from the inside and fight it daily.

Expecting to fight it daily is a necessary mindset if the fight is to be won. Distraction is not a simple foe; it must be fought on numerous fronts. Victory is achieved not by [one glorious coup d'état of resolve](#), but by the slow insurgency of developing distraction-reducing habits.

The Speed of God

However, this likely requires an expectation recalibration on our part. We children of the high-tech/information age, and grandchildren of the manufacturing and industrial ages, find it increasingly hard to appreciate the speed of God. We have learned to value efficiencies in quickness, quantity, and cost. Produce something desirable fast, scalable, and cheap, and the outcome will be success. We've also learned to value disposability and devalue durability.

"Distraction is not defeated in a few fell

blows, but by many small, habitual ones."

But when God builds things, he often takes a long time (at least from our perspective) to do it. And what he builds, he builds to endure. Consider how he designed us. We require roughly nine months from conception to the point where we can survive outside the womb. Then we require roughly two additional decades before we acquire sufficient developmental maturity, knowledge, and skills to live independently from our parents.

And how are our developmental maturity, knowledge, and skills acquired during those two decades? Through rigorous repetition. Muscle and information memory are developed and sustained through the arduous process of daily, habitual practice.

The Slow, Everyday Miracle

Now, we know that God at times employs miraculous power to bring about instantaneous change in people's lives. Deliverances and gifts of healings are very real aspects of the kingdom of God in this age. The Bible even commands us to earnestly desire them and seek them ([1 Corinthians 12:31](#)). I believe if we desired them and sought them more, they would occur more often.

However, the whole witness of Scripture and redemptive history tells us that even when they are more frequent, miraculous, instantaneous transformations are always exceptional (rare) in this age, not normative. Most of our healings will be experienced through the relatively slow

processes with which God wonderfully and wisely equips our bodies. And most of our deliverances will be experienced through the relatively slow (at times frustratingly so) processes with which God wonderfully and wisely equips our minds and souls — replacing habitual responses of belief in deceptive promises and condemning accusations with habitual responses of faith in the true promises and gracious acceptance of God.

“Expecting to fight distraction daily is a necessary mindset if the fight is to be won.”

We talk a lot about the [habits of grace](#) at Desiring God, because routines build and shape human character, skill, affection, and creativity. Scripture teaches and history reinforces that habitual routines of [Bible meditation](#), [prayer](#), and [church fellowship](#) are God’s primary gracious means of our transformation. Rome wasn’t built in a day. Neither are we. We are built slowly, incrementally, painstakingly, brick by brick, day by day, over time — at God’s speed.

What Distractions Tell You

Now, God does want us to be delivered from the [fragmenting effect of fruitless](#)

[distraction](#) ([Luke 10:40](#)). He wants us focused on what’s most important ([Luke 10:41–42](#)). But it’s very unlikely that we will receive a quick fix, because there is more going on in distraction than we often realize. In fact, we have a lot to learn from all that is happening in us when we’re tempted to be distracted.

First, distractions frequently tell us what we love and trust and fear. We gravitate toward desires we crave and away from fears we wish to avoid. Listen to what your familiar (habitual) distractions are saying. In what are you seeking joy? In what are you seeking shelter? What are you trying to escape?

Distractions also tell us where we formed poor habits earlier in life that we’ve not adequately addressed yet. Some bad habits are due to growing up in broken family systems, and some are indulgent habits we formed in youth or adolescence for which we must now be mature enough to take responsibility.

Distractions can also tell us biological realities we must deal with: ADHD, OCD, chronic depression, bipolar disorder, and other maladies. Medication supervised by a



skilled physician can be of significant help, but we also need to actively cultivate new habits to mitigate the effects of a disordered biology.

What are your distractions telling you? Record them as you notice them for two or three weeks. You will not fight them successfully until you know what's fueling them. Distractions fueled by different disordered loves or fears or biology or plain old bad habits require different habitual battle strategies.

Trained by Constant Practice

Healthy habits are strategies. If resolves are our objectives (desired outcomes), habits are our strategies. Or to use a different metaphor, the engine of our resolve must run on the tracks of our habits. Resolve can only travel as far as the tracks of habits have been laid.

“Distractions frequently tell us what we love and trust and fear.”

[Hebrews 5:14](#) says that very thing: “But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” That verse helps set our expectations. Spiritual maturity is the goal; constant practice is the means.

When I played soccer in high school, all the players enjoyed the games. Few of us enjoyed the monotonous skill-building exercises. No one I knew enjoyed the grueling conditioning exercises. But our ability to win games was largely determined by how hard we pushed ourselves in practice.

Constant practice is the only way any skill is grown and maintained in anything, including the skill of distinguishing between fruitful focus and unfruitful distraction.

But How?

Yes, but what do we do to constantly practice resisting distraction? I told you up front that I had no distraction hacks to offer. And neither does the Bible. Have you ever noticed it rarely gives us clear, practical how-to's? Why is that?

One reason, I believe, is that our behaviors are driven by divergent and complex factors, and so formulas are typically of marginal help. What helps me may not help you much.

But another reason is that the difficult process of wrestling through ambiguities and internal resistance and confusion is part of the training itself. We learn necessary things about our affections, weaknesses, and bodies. The difficult process ends up yielding benefits of increased faith, wisdom, and perseverance that extend far beyond just the issue of distraction.

“Prayerfully aim to defeat distraction through the slow, steady insurgency of building new habits.”

If we ask God, he will give us what we need in this fight ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#); [Philippians 4:19](#)). But we must keep in mind: all aspects of the fight of faith is a fight ([1 Timothy 6:12](#)). We need to build endurance ([Hebrews 10:36](#)). We need to learn to discipline and control our bodies ([1 Corinthians 9:27](#)).

God isn't merely concerned with the most efficient way to free us from distraction. He's concerned with what will produce the greatest and most enduring spiritual fruit in our life. So, prayerfully aim to defeat distraction through the slow, steady insurgency of building new habits, one at a time.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/practice-defeating-your-distractions>

Fighting the Giants in Your Mind

By Rick Warren and Malcolm Gladwell

Today, we're going to look at how to face the giants in your life and work. Your ability to dream is a God-given gift. It's what sets you apart from animals. Animals cannot imagine the future. But God gave you—made in His image—the ability to remember the past (that's memory) and to visualize or imagine the future (that's dreaming). You've got to have a dream. Without it, you're just drifting through life, letting it happen to you.

By the way, when you're coasting, you're always going downhill. You need a dream for your life. It is one of the greatest gifts God has given you—the ability to dream. We are most like our Creator when we are creative. Nothing happens without a dream. Every piece of art, every business, every invention, every product—everything starts because someone dreamed it.

Napoleon said, "Imagination rules the world." Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." It's this ability to dream that makes us creators in the image of God.

I've invested my life helping people discover God's dream and purpose for their lives—and then helping them fulfill it. And what I've discovered is this: for every one person who figures out their life dream, their life work (which is more important than a job, because jobs change, but your life work doesn't), there

are nine people who are too afraid to even get started.

Why are we afraid to go after our dreams? Because of the giants in the pathway—those giant problems, those dream-busters that stand in your way and say, "You will not go any further." If you believe those giants, you get stuck in mediocrity. These problems can be financial, emotional, relational, physical. So how do you face these giants?

Thankfully, we have a powerful story in the Bible that shows us how: the story of David and Goliath.

My friend, Malcolm Gladwell wrote a book called *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*. I invited Malcolm to share this message today.

Malcolm Gladwell:

The story of David and Goliath has fascinated me for years and inspired my latest book. What intrigues me is the unexpected depth and complexity within this tale.

Most of you know the basics. Three thousand years ago in Palestine, there's a standoff. The Israelites and Philistines met in the Valley of Elah. The Israelites dug in along the northern ridge; the Philistines on the southern. And they just stared at each other. Eventually, the Philistines sent out their champion—

Goliath, a giant warrior over seven feet tall, outfitted with massive bronze armor, a huge javelin. And Goliath challenged Israel: “Send out your best fighter, and let’s settle this one-on-one!”

No Israelite would accept the challenge—until a young shepherd named David stepped up.

King Saul told him, “You can’t fight him. You’re just a kid. He’s a seasoned warrior.” But David replied, “I’ve killed lions and bears. I’m ready.”

David refused Saul’s armor and instead picked up five smooth stones, walked into the valley, and faced Goliath with a sling and his faith in God.

Goliath mocked him: “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” David slung one stone, struck Goliath in the forehead, and felled the giant. He ran forward, took Goliath’s sword, and cut off his head. The Philistines fled.

Goliath’s size, the very thing that made him appear intimidating, was also his greatest weakness. Giants are not what they seem. Obstacles often look bigger than they really are. The kinds of obstacles we face in our life are not nearly as insurmountable and depressing and overwhelming as they appear to be at first blush. Look closely and you’ll see that Giants can be slain particularly by those who have the spirit of the Lord in their hearts.

Rick Warren:

You’re probably never going to face a literal giant like David did. But you will face giants—emotional, relational, financial, spiritual, and professional—that can keep you from living out the dream God has put in your heart. In 1 Samuel 17, before David even reaches Goliath, he has to face four other giants—none of them physical, but each just as intimidating. These are the giants you and I are far more likely to face.

Let’s rewind to 1 Samuel 16. God tells the prophet Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the next king of Israel. So, Samuel goes to Jesse and asks to see his sons. Jesse parades seven of them before Samuel—none are chosen. Finally, the youngest, David, is brought in from the fields. God says, “That’s the one.” David is anointed as king. And then—nothing happens.

David goes right back to tending sheep. There is a long delay between the dream and its fulfillment, and that’s the first giant you will face:

1. The Giant of Delay

No dream is fulfilled instantly. There’s always a waiting period. David’s own father held him back, believing he was too young and inexperienced. 1 Samuel 17:15 says, “David was held back to care for the sheep in Bethlehem.”

Some of you know what that feels like. You’ve been held back—because of your age, your race, your gender, or others’ opinions. Sometimes, the people who love you most are the very ones who hold you back.

2. The Giant of Discouragement

Jesse sends David to deliver food to his brothers on the battlefield. When David arrives, he hears Goliath shouting threats at Israel’s army. No one is doing anything. The entire army is paralyzed by fear and discouragement.

Verses 8–11 say that Goliath came out day after day, taunting them. “When Saul and all the Israelites heard this, they were deeply shaken and paralyzed with fear.”

Why? Because they were listening to the wrong voice.

Verse 16 tells us, “For 40 days, twice a day, the Philistine giant berated the Israelite army.” If you listen to negative voices long enough, you become negative. Fear, like discouragement, is contagious.

Who are you listening to? Are they building your faith—or feeding your fear?

3. The Giant of Disapproval

David's own brother questions his motives: “Why are you here, David? Why aren't you watching your few sheep? You cocky little brat!”

Sound familiar? Maybe you've experienced this kind of family skepticism—people who can't imagine you doing something they've never done. People who belittle your dream because they can't see what God sees in you.

You'll have to decide: Whose approval matters more—God's or people's? Let the size of your God determine the size of your goal.

4. The Giant of Doubt

King Saul, the expert in warfare, tells David, “You can't do this. You're just a boy.”

Even experts can be wrong. When I told a church-planting expert in Texas I was moving to California to start a church with no money, no members, and no experience, he told me, “That's the dumbest idea I've ever heard.” Years later, he admitted he was dead wrong.

You will have doubts. And people will doubt you. But the key is to remember how God has helped you in the past and to expect Him to help you again.

So how do you defeat these giants that are keeping you from being the man God wants you to be? To be a person of great faith with a great dream and a great life's work? How do you overcome those giants? You do the very things that David did.

1. Remember How God Helped You in the Past

David said, “I've killed lions and bears to protect my sheep. The God who helped me then will help me now.” Recalling

God's past faithfulness builds confidence for the future.

2. Use the Tools God Has Given You

David didn't wear Saul's armor—it didn't fit. Instead, he used what he knew: a sling and five smooth stones. Don't wait for what you don't have. Use what God's already placed in your hands.

Ecclesiastes 11:4 says, “If you wait for perfect conditions, you'll never get anything done.”

3. Ignore the Dream Busters

David received no encouragement—not from his family, his king, or the army. He had to encourage himself in the Lord (1 Samuel 30:6). That's deeper than positive thinking—it's about a deep trust in God's goodness, power, and plan.

4. Expect God to Help You for His Glory

David shouted to Goliath, “You come with a sword and javelin, but I come in the name of the Lord. Today the Lord will conquer you!”

David's confidence wasn't in himself—it was in God. Every time God moves, it's because someone believes. “According to your faith, it will be done unto you” (Matthew 9:29).

You get to choose how much you trust God. And that choice—the faith factor—is what defeats the giants of delay, discouragement, disapproval, and doubt. If you say “yes” to God, He will take you on the adventure of your life.

No matter what's happened before, your future can still be fully surrendered to Him.

Watch full video here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dm8B_u2aqw

When Your Soul Stops Singing: Try This

By John Ortberg

We've got to get out more. That's what Nancy and I are doing—we're out in creation. You may occasionally hear two members of that creation, Baxter and Cooper, who are sitting here on the deck with us, along with the birds. Baxter is doing great. Cooper, however, has been walking in the flesh today, so he's currently over in the timeout corner.

As we reflect on technology and the spiritual life, today we're talking about creation—and the need to get out into the real world more often.

Yesterday, Nancy and I were in Yosemite. We hiked for more than five hours up to Vernal Falls—a 2,000-foot elevation climb. It was spectacular. The beauty does something to the soul.

I want to share something Dallas Willard once wrote about spiritual formation. He said we're not aiming at professing perfect doctrine, nor are we aiming to conform to external rules in a way that doesn't change the heart. Instead, the goal is to replace our habits—especially the habit of love.

Dallas wrote:

“We want to help people—starting with ourselves—become pervaded with the love of God, so that disciples will dearly love and constantly delight in their heavenly Father, made real to the earth through Jesus. We are to come to believe that there is no limit, no catch, to the goodness of God's intentions and His power to carry them out.”

One of the things that helps cultivate this kind of faith is immersing ourselves in creation. Dallas wrote:

“We care for and love this astonishingly rich and beautiful physical realm—the earth itself—of which both we and our neighbors are parts. ‘You have established the earth, and it continues,’ Psalm 119 says. ‘All things stand this day according to your direction.’ God Himself loves the earth dearly and never takes His hands off of it.

There is a natural order of things that is good to respect. Human beings naturally understand this if they haven't been robbed of their good sense by experience or education.

For example, one provision of the ancient law given to the Israelites was that a baby goat should not be cooked in its mother's milk. That might sound odd to modern ears, but anyone who has lived closely with goats will understand the wrongness of using what the mother produces to sustain her baby to instead cook it.

Life is naturally structured throughout by such goodness and appropriateness.”

When we're in nature and reflect on the goodness of life and beauty, something shifts in our souls.

Astonishment and Intention

The word that stood out to Nancy from that reading was “astonishing.” We both felt that deeply yesterday in Yosemite.

Even now, sitting here, the birds are flitting and chirping all around. When you make something for someone—whether it’s a meal or an experience—you hope they notice.

Our granddaughter is turning three tomorrow. Her favorite color is purple, so today we’re making her a purple cake with pink frosting. We want her to notice it. We want her to know we see her. And I think a lot of what we experience in nature is God’s way of saying, “I hope you notice. I hope you see that I see you.”

For me, that reminder means a lot—especially when life feels heavy. Creation reminds me that whoever made all this is good and can be trusted.

Creation and Doubt

For some, the central spiritual doubt is “Is there anything out there?” For me, it’s more often, “I believe God is there—but is He good?”

Being out in creation helps answer that. So much of what God made is gratuitous. It’s not strictly necessary, but it’s full of delight. That abundance speaks to His goodness.

I remember a session Dallas taught nearly 30 years ago. We were sitting by a lake with ducks paddling nearby, and he paused to reflect on the word gratuitous—how it relates to grace and gratitude. He said, “What a gratuitous thing a duck is!” They’re odd little animals, unnecessary in a utilitarian sense, yet full of joy. God, he said, is gratuitously good. Nature communicates that in a way that words can’t.

The Little Book and the Big Book

In the spiritual tradition, there’s the idea of the “little book”—the Bible—and the “big book,” which is creation. Just as God expresses Himself in the written Word, “the heavens are telling the glory of God.”

That’s why getting outside can actually be a spiritual practice. Watching the people yesterday in Yosemite—especially the kids—was a reminder of that. Their pure delight in their surroundings reminded me to ask: Where is that spirit in me?

There were a few people with music blasting (which really ought to be illegal in a place like that!), but most were simply enjoying the moment. Seeing the kids squeal with joy made me wonder: When was the last time I did that?

Then Sings My Soul

There’s an old hymn I grew up with: How Great Thou Art. It’s written by a Swede—like many great works of art! One verse says:

“O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made.
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.”

And then comes the refrain: “Then sings my soul...”

It’s not just about choosing to sing. Something in the soul responds reflexively to the beauty and vastness of creation—because God made it. Even though the world is fallen, it still reveals something of God’s kingdom and His will.

It’s powerful to give space for that—to not rush past it, but to let your body, mind, and heart absorb it.

An Invitation to Wonder

So, the invitation today is simple: get out more. Experience creation. Look. Reflect. Listen to the birds. Pay attention. And then connect the dots: “This is a little shaft of light. And when I trace it back to its source, I remember: every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights.”

In California, it's easy to do this. (You might want to move out here—just saying!) But truly, all of it is God's creation.

In Hebrew, there's no word for "nature." There's just "creation." There's no separation between the natural and the supernatural. The Hebrew worldview naturally connects all of it back to the Creator.

What More Could You Want?

So often, we crave supernatural experiences. And I think God is saying, "Hello? Have you seen what I already did for you?"

It's enough.

Yosemite is often associated with John Muir, the great naturalist whose father was a Scottish pastor. When you read his reflections on nature, there's something transcendent in them. He found God there. So can we.

We talked about that on our hike—when

I could still talk! Imagine being one of the first humans to see this landscape, whether Native American or later explorer. The awe must have been overwhelming.

And isn't it interesting that when Jesus came, He didn't come to a climate unlike California. He came to a place where people lived most of their waking hours outside in God's creation. There's something about that that makes the soul sing.

It's medicinal.

Let Your Soul Sing

So—has your soul sung today?

Would you like it to?

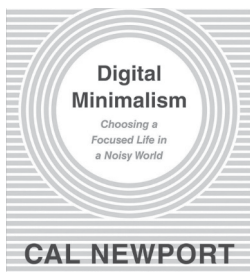
Then maybe you and I—we should get out more.

Watch the full video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJcMh8kOcuc>



Check It Out: Books, Apps etc.

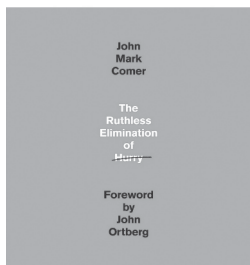
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Books

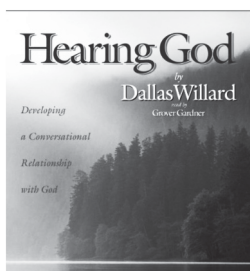
Digital Minimalism by Cal Newport

Minimalism is the art of knowing how much is just enough. Digital minimalism applies this idea to our personal technology. It's the key to living a focused life in an increasingly noisy world.



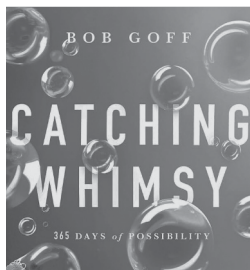
The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry By John Mark Comer

How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World A compelling emotional and spiritual case against hurry and in favor of a slower, simpler way of life



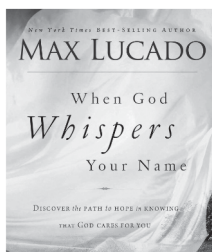
Hearing God By Dallas Willard

Being close to God means communicating with Him—telling Him what is on our hearts in prayer and hearing and understanding what he is saying to us. It is this second half of our conversation with God that is so important but that also can be so difficult. The key, says best-selling author Dallas Willard, is to focus not so much on individual actions and decisions as on building our personal relationship with our Creator.



Catching Whimsy: 365 Days of Possibility By Bob Goff

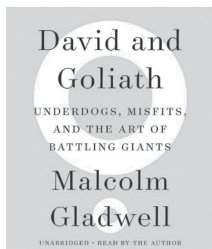
Bestselling author Bob Goff takes you on a yearlong journey into the uplifting, inspiring, and unexpected possibilities waiting for you every day. Catching Whimsy is a 365-day devotional offering you a daily tap on the shoulder to remind you how over the moon God is about you and your beautiful, often complicated life.



When God Whispers Your Name: Discover the Path to Hope in Knowing that God Cares for You

By Max Lucado

These days, bad news often outpaces the good. Problems outnumber solutions. You may turn and ask, "Where is God at a time like this?" Friend, he's right here. And he's whispering your name. Max Lucado is here to share some good news: in the Bible and in the circumstances of your life, God whispers your name lovingly, tenderly, patiently, and persistently.



David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants

Malcolm Gladwell

In *David and Goliath*, Malcolm Gladwell challenges how we think about obstacles and disadvantages, offering a new interpretation of what it means to be discriminated against, or cope with a disability, or lose a parent. Gladwell demonstrates how much of what is beautiful and important in the world arises from what looks like suffering and adversity.



Podcasts/Websites

Become New with John Ortberg

<https://becomenew.com>

Daily 10 Minute Devotions. "God's greatest work in you is who you become. Our mission is to help."



Daily Dose of Wisdom

Brandon McGuire

I started this channel to help equip believers for this challenging cultural moment so that we can reflect a more authentic, in-depth, and winsome portrait of who God is and what Christianity actually teaches. There are a lot of objections to be addressed and questions to be answered.

No Hate. Just Love.



Heaven Meets Earth

Abigail Robertson & Ryan Bethea

Real stories of God at work today with influential Christian leaders. Heaven Meets Earth shares powerful testimonies and discussions, proving God's faithfulness through generations.

Prayer Focus

For Victims of Natural Disasters

This month, our hearts turn to those who have been impacted by natural disasters around the world—families who have lost loved ones, homes, livelihoods, and communities in the wake of storms, floods, fires, and earthquakes. In recent months we’ve seen a devastating earthquake in Myanmar, and major flooding in Spain, Nigeria, Pakistan and Texas. Let’s pray together for all those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, who are displaced or in need of shelter. Let’s ask the Lord to surround them with His peace and meet every need. Let’s also pray for the first responders and relief workers—that God would strengthen and protect them as they serve. And above all let’s ask the Lord to turn hearts toward Him during this time of crisis, and that many would come to know His love, hope, and salvation.

Psalm 46:1–2

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.”

Isaiah 43:2

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.”

2 Corinthians 1:3–4

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

Psalm 34:18

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”



Peace in the Stillness

Think about the last time you walked into an arcade or theme park. What was the experience like? Probably a thousand things vied for your attention, including bright flashing lights, cacophonous music, and crowded walkways. In all likelihood, it was hard to focus (and impossible to have a conversation).

Everyday life can also feel like that sometimes—too much input and not enough time to process everything that’s going on. It’s no wonder that we struggle to hear the Lord’s “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12 KJV) in all of it! Jesus faced this same problem, which is why He made sure to get away and spend time with His Father (Mark 1:35).

Psalms 46:10 calls us to stillness: “Stop striving and know that I am God.” To enjoy this continuous inner peace, we must periodically pause everything and let our soul become aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence. David described it as being like a “weaned child” at perfect rest in his mother’s arms.

Intentionally slowing down can be difficult to do, but experiencing the serenity and rest God provides is a gift well worth seeking.

Psalms 131:1-2 O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; Nor do I involve myself in great matters, Or in things too difficult for me. Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; Like a weaned child rests against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me.

Mark 1:35 In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.