

Andy's Smartphone letter continued from front page

When the telephone was first invented, our ability to communicate with someone in a distant location was bound by a cord attached to a phone on the wall. When cell phones came along, the boundaries were once again broadened, and the smartphone essentially obliterated time-space boundaries. For instance, there used to be a well-defined boundary between work and home for many non-agrarian workers. A person left work when he or she hopped in the car to head home. But now, employers chime the hip-hugging smartphone with email at all hours. Likewise, there once was a fairly well-defined boundary between time spent with one's family and time with others outside the family. I remember sitting at the kitchen table growing up, and when the phone would ring, my dad would wave his hand and say, "Don't worry about it. We're eating; they can call back." Now, when a family sits down to eat, there are often incessant chimes, dings, and interruptions from texts and social media updates. Additionally, there used to be boundaries between enjoying something like a wedding, a ballgame, or a church service, and that which was going on outside those events. When you were at such an event, you could only be there. Now, people sit in a wedding and peruse their Twitter feed, or sit in courtside seats which cost hundreds of dollars, consumed with how many people "liked" their courtside selfie, or go online during worship. The boundaries of holidays have also dissolved. We drive hundreds of miles to be with family for the holidays, but then end up sitting around gazing into our phones once we are all together. It's become socially acceptable to use one's phone at any time in any place. Thus, our finitude—our limited human capabilities are continually pushed to the max.

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her phone 150 times per day.⁵ With smartphones, we can check real-time sports scores, scroll through a news feed, or play Candy Crush at any moment. With smartphones, we can get instant gratification. If we are bored, we need only to click open an app and whisk our boredom away.

In many ways, smartphones have become pacifiers for adults. They are a means of mental pacification anytime we don't have any other pressing need. Whenever we have a free moment, we can check our phone and zombie-out to the mind-candy before us. The immediate gratification of the smartphone pacifier is difficult to resist.

Pacifiers have their purpose, but if a child is allowed to have a pacifier too long, it will prohibit needed maturity. Likewise, the excessive immediate gratification of checking a smartphone can prohibit maturity in other areas.

For one, it is well documented that those who resort to the smartphone pacifier have difficulty sustaining long-term focus (which is necessary to make it this far reading an essay—is anyone reading this still?). Focus is needed for many jobs, for critical thinking and for an in-depth relationship with the Lord. We must cultivate the

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We can accomplish less than we think, we can handle fewer relationships than we think, and we can be engaged in fewer mental tasks at once than we tend to think. Smartphones make us think otherwise by allowing us to stretch communication boundaries beyond what we can sustain.

In the always-connected life of smartphone users, many people feel busier than they actually are, are more stressed out than they need to be, and are less effective doing whatever they are doing because they are "virtually" stretched in many places and many relationships at one time. A return to boundaries is sorely needed. God made us with boundaries, with good limitations, and I believe that we must exercise restraint—seeking to be in one place and one time as much as possible in order have the soul health that He offers.

Smartphones Offer Instant Gratification Which Can Prohibit Long-Term Maturity

In 2013, ABC news reported that the average person checks his/



ability to fix our eyes repeatedly on the things of heaven, we must renew our minds, we must take thoughts captive to make them obedient to Christ, and we must meditate on his glory.

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Additionally, popping in the smartphone pacifier can limit creativity. Rather than actively contem-

plating our surroundings, actively thinking, actively engaging conversations, we tend to opt for the quick-fix instant gratification of plugging into the Matrix to passively consume data.

Most of all, the short term gratification of the smartphone pacifier is a major hindrance to cultivating relationships with other real-life humans. Relationships require time together, attention, and good listening, each of which can be subverted by smartphone overuse.

How many parents spend more time with their face in a screen than they do listening to and playing with their children? Could it be that much parental anger and harshness stems from the fact that children are actually taking the “pacifier” away from their parents? While entranced in our phones, we parents can be easily angered at our kids for “bothering us”, though they are only asking us to do normal things that parents have always done.

Marriages don't seem to be flourishing from unbounded smartphone use either. A 2014 survey showed that 63% of people ages 18-29 actually sleep with their phone in their bed—not counting phones which remain inches away on a nightstand.⁶ As one who has a front row seat to many marriages in our church and community, a common complaint from one spouse to another is that “he/she is on their phone all the time.” Maybe it's time we consider throwing our “friends” out of our bedrooms.

Pacifiers give immature children immediate gratification, but maturity only comes when they learn to delay gratification and wait for something better. Smartphones give us instant gratification in that we never have to be bored again, but when usage is not limited, we are short-circuiting long-term maturity in numerous areas.

Application:

The danger of an essay like this is that a.) You'll feel guilty for a few minutes about using your smartphone, but go on your way without evaluating your habits, or b.) that you'll feel self-righteous for not being like all the other sinners out there who tweet and text three hours a day.

So I want to be clear. I'm not advocating a new legalistic anti-smartphone morality. Smartphones are an impressive display of God-given ingenuity and they are here to stay. My point is simply that we need boundaries with our smartphones because too much of a good thing makes us sick.

There are many boundaries that you could put in your life, but here are a few you may want to consider:

1. Ask Someone If You're On Your Phone Too Much.

Ask a spouse, friend or coworker, “Do you think I'm on my phone too much?” or “Do you think I'm disengaged?” Don't be defensive when they respond honestly. Just thank them for speaking truth into your life and be willing to change.

2. Plug Your Phone Into the Wall.

Have set times in the day when you plug your phone into the wall. When you come home from work, turn up the ringer, plug your phone in, and use it as an old-school phone. When you're on your deathbed, you will not wish that you kept your phone on you more. You'll wish you loved people better and were more present in the moment.

3. Get an Alarm Clock.

A lot of people use their phone as an alarm clock, but if your phone has commandeered your bedroom and it's stealing relationship from your spouse and sleep from you—consider docking your phone in the kitchen at night, and using an alarm clock. Try it for a month. What's there to lose?

4. Take a Smartphone Sabbatical

For \$30 or less you can get a dumbphone. Simply take it to your cell service provider, have them switch your contacts, and do a smartphone fast for a month or a year. The first week of withdrawal will probably hurt, but it may eventually be a means of refreshing freedom.

Finally, consider 1 Cor. 6:12, where Paul writes, “Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything.” Smartphones are permissible, but for some, they are not beneficial. So I ask, “Are you enslaved to your smartphone?” If so, it's time for a change.

*Grace & Peace,
Andy*

¹ NPR staff, “Bored and Brilliant: A Challenge to Disconnect from Your Phone”, All Tech Considered, Jan. 12, 2015, accessed July 17, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2015/01/12/376717870/bored-and-brilliant-a-challenge-to-disconnect-from-your-phone>.

² Katherine Bindley, “When Children Text All Day, What Happens to Their Social Skills?” HuffPost Screen Sense, Dec. 12, 2011, accessed July 17, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/09/children-texting-technology-social-skills_n_1137570.html.

³ Albert Mohler, “The Pornification of a Culture-What's Going On in the Office Next Door?” The Briefing, July 27, 2009, accessed July 17, 2015, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/07/27/the-pornification-of-a-culture-whats-going-on-in-the-office-next-door/>.

⁴ Francis and Lisa Chan, *You and Me Forever: Marriage in Light of Eternity* (San Francisco: Claire Love Publishing, 2014), 26.

⁵ Joanna Stern, “Cellphone Users Check Phones 150x/Day and Other Internet Fun Facts”, Good Morning America, May 29, 2013, accessed July 17, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/technology/2013/05/cellphone-users-check-phones-150xday-and-other-internet-fun-facts/>.

⁶ Alena Hall, “7 Reasons to Banish Your Phone from Your Bedroom” HuffPost Healthy Living, Nov. 3, 2014, accessed July 17, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/03/no-phone-in-bed_n_6022284.html.