

How Zoom Fatigue Can Teach Us to Pray

By Jason Cheung

Why is being on Zoom so exhausting? No surprise here, according to [this paper](#): fatigue is caused by “non-verbal overload.” Four explanations are given: 1) excessive amounts of close-up eye gaze, 2) cognitive overload, 3) increased self-evaluation from staring at video of oneself, and 4) constraints on physical mobility. In other words, it’s not just talking and listening that tires you out, it’s just sitting there *in silence*.

Typically taking a break, being quiet and pausing in the middle of a busy day helps. But video conferencing—and the sudden onset of all this since the beginning of COVID-19—has impacted work, school, and relationship so much, our overall health is affected. We were not made for such intense, focused, face-to-face, “close-up” conversations - with all the people in our lives. FaceTime with Grandma? Yes, please! Daily Zoom chats with my colleagues or classmates (no matter how much I love them)? Tiring.

Why is this? What’s a theological reason for this? Because, as we are made in the image of God, we are made to love like God. *And love doesn’t happen quickly*. While Zoom conveniently connects, its design for interfacing people is limited. Video conferencing can be good for exchanging ideas and setting plans in place, but terrible for listening to a person’s heart and dreams and sorrows.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m thankful for Zoom in that it allows us to gather to worship each Sunday, my kids get Chinese school lessons, piano lessons, gymnastic lessons, French lessons, cooking lessons, and the odd game of Skribbl.io. But, after 12 long months - I’m just *tired*. Straight up, flat out *tired*. This isn’t a word, but it’s how I feel - and I happily share this personal lament of mine: I feel *blah*.

But, what if the four reasons for Zoom “overload” can lead us to consider prayer to our Heavenly Father with greater purpose and meaning? There might be a way to turn our tiredness around—not just from Zoom, but from this whole pandemic.

1) Instead of too much, close-up eye gaze, take time to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. It takes some discipline to peel our eyes off our screens. Certainly, we are obliged and have responsibilities to fill. But the practice of turning our gaze to the Lord can be aided with a quick walk around the block, a long hike on the weekend, or even just a short glance out your window. As spring is around the corner - the longer days give opportunity to see the Lord’s creation. I have heard stories from many in our community who have committed to do this, and their example has encouraged me. *Gaze on the beauty of the Lord*.

*One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.* - Psalm 27:4

2) Rather than becoming tired with sending and receiving extra non-verbal cues, sit still in the presence of the Lord. Large and long Zoom meetings likely means you're listening more than talking. But even so, the time in *that* Zoom room draws energy out of you. When time allows, scale down the cues to zero, and present yourself to your Heavenly Father only. No need to sit up straight, comb your hair, and be ready to Unmute whenever you might be called upon (how stressful!). God knows us. Slow down and take the time to know him.

*Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.* - Psalm 46:10

3) Refrain from looking at yourself in the mirror all day and, instead, look at Christ. This applies whether you use Zoom or not! But the function on Zoom to "Hide Self-View" is a wonderful gift. Try that, or at least try "blinking" and minimize the Zoom window for 5 -10 seconds (while still engaging in the meeting). This reminds me of the discipline of self-forgetfulness, which is both a lost art and an essential aspect of Christian formation. There are physical and psychological benefits to stop staring at ourselves, sure, but the Gospel also frees us from both loving ourselves too much, or hating ourselves too much. Why? Because how Christ sees me is all that matters. Take a look at Tim Keller's short book [*The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy*](#).

As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. - 1 Corinthians 4:3-4

4) Don't be confined to one box or space, rather stretch and learn new ways to pray and deepen your life with God. The author of the paper explains the conical shape of the camera's field of view is called a *frustrum*: close up to the camera the field of view is small, while farther away from the camera the area is larger. I can't help but laugh that this is called a *frustrum*. When I'm on a long Zoom call, I often feel stuck; it's so frustrumating. 😊 Seriously - this entire virtual exercise can really make us feel "boxed-in," or stuck. Prayer can feel like that too. Which is why learning the prayers in the Bible, reading the Psalms slowly, considering the pacing of the Christian calendar through Lent, Advent and Pentecost - all these are ways to step out and learn "a new song."

*I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear the LORD
and put their trust in him.*

- Psalm 40:1-3

Overall, the pandemic has brought an exhaustion many of us have never felt before. And not only individually - but collectively, as a country and the world over. We certainly need the encouragement of one another - so I encourage you to give it, as you can. Send a note to a friend, give a call to a coworker, perhaps even set up a Zoom call with someone. But in all, bring your tiredness to the Lord our God, who knows us well, hears our cries, and through all this, even so, gives us hope and strength.