

The Focused Faith

Brian Bovee

Published by Brian Bovee, 2024.

While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the publisher assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

THE FOCUSED FAITH

First edition. September 3, 2024.

Copyright © 2024 Brian Bovee.

Written by Brian Bovee.

To Him be the Glory!

THE FOCUSED FAITH

DETOX YOUR DIGITAL LIFE
RECLAIM HIJACKED ATTENTION
BUILD HABITS FOR FOCUS & JOY



DR. BRIAN S. BOVEE

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved worldwide.

Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction

1. Lost in Scroll: Why Focus Feels Impossible

2. Flowing into Abundance: The True Cure for a Distracted Mind

3. Screens and Souls: How Technology Shapes Our Walk with God

4. Alone, Not Lonely: The Transformative Gift of Solitude

5. Focused Hearts, Open Souls: The Connection Between Attention and Prayer

6. The Lost Art of Deep Reading: Navigating the Noise to Find Truth

7. Purging Distraction: The Transformative Journey of Detox and Flow

Study Guide

Checklists and Forms

HOW TO GRAB THE FULL BOOK FREE!

Preface

Imagine this scenario: You have just landed after a long flight to a foreign city, far from home. Exhausted from the journey, you drop your bags into the trunk of your rental car and realize your phone is dead due to a broken charging cable *and* there is no GPS in the car. With no map or directions, you make the unwise decision to attempt to start the hour-long journey to your hotel. You find yourself driving aimlessly through unfamiliar streets, taking wrong turns, backtracking, and growing increasingly frustrated as you try to find your way. The more you wander, the more lost you feel, and the more elusive the safety of your hotel becomes.

This scenario might sound like a travel nightmare, but it's an apt metaphor for how many of us live our lives today. Without a clear sense of direction, without focus, we wander through life aimlessly, responding to the immediate demands or distractions of our digital devices. Just as a journey requires a destination and a map, we also need a clear purpose and focus on our journey if we are to reach our goals and live life abundantly.

The apostle Paul understood this well, as he expressed in Philippians 3:13–14, “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (NIV throughout). Paul’s singular focus is on his spiritual journey, pressing on toward the goal, despite the distractions of his day. Paul reminds us here that our path to a full and abundant life in Christ requires a deliberate focus and perseverance, ignoring past and present distractions. In the following verse Paul shifts his perspective from his own testimony to his exhortation for you and me: “All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.”

Paul is calling us here to adopt his same mindset of pressing on toward the goal. He is graciously reminding us that maturity is not about arriving at spiritual perfection but about having the right attitude toward the journey—an attitude of perseverance and focus. Paul acknowledges that while we all have different perspectives and ways to make the journey, the promise is clear: God will reveal His truth to you in due time if you can keep your eyes focused on the prize.

Yet in today's digital world, it can seem impossible to remain focused on God's calling for our lives or keep focused on anything really. From the moment we wake, our attention easily drifts and bounces as if it is under siege from outside forces designed to draw us away from where we intend to focus our thoughts. Our devices buzz with notifications leading us to the infinite scroll of social media and news feeds—all leading us away from deep and meaningful moments of our life. Yet Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). This promise of an abundant life is not found in the superficial satisfaction that our devices offer but in the richness of our relationship with God, the depth of our connections with others, and the pursuit of our true purpose.

This book is *not* another book on how to develop healthy habits for using digital technologies. The dangers of social media and excessive screen-time have been researched and discussed ad nauseam. This *is* a book about (1) how the attention economy is working tirelessly against you to capture and sustain your attention and (2) how you can reclaim your focus. My research, including numerous personal interviews with experts and in-depth studies conducted as part of my academic work, reveals that this situation is not merely a matter of personal willpower. It's actually a carefully crafted assault on your ability to concentrate.

At first this may sound a bit like the latest conspiracy theory. But stay with me, and I will make the case, using empirically validated research,

along with admissions from those running the companies in the attention economy, that your brain is literally being rewired to make it more difficult for you to concentrate. These physiological changes are manifested deeply in the increasing difficulty you have felt in praying for more than five minutes, spending time alone with your thoughts, and in deep reading of the Bible and other literature. I will also make the case that the attention economy is largely responsible for conditioning us to seek instant gratification, which leaves us constantly restless and unfulfilled. You will learn how “solitude deprivation,” a new diagnosis for our era, is leaving us increasingly isolated, more informed yet less wise, more entertained yet less joyful.

This book is a journey, a journey like Paul’s to forget your past failures and press on to reclaim your focus from the attention economy that seeks to fragment it. I will provide you with the tools to face this battle on two fronts: *individually*, by providing you with proven research on how to use three types of your attention on developing your passions as an antidote to distraction, and *systemically*, by helping you understand the world in which you live and the powerful design strategies of the attention economy that profit from your distraction. But more than anything else in this book, my deepest prayer is that you come to live the life Jesus calls you to—a life of deep connection, intentional solitude, and unwavering attention to the things that truly matter.

While I can’t promise your life will be full as a result of reading this book, I can tell you that my life has been transformed through what I have learned. When I started studying this topic many years ago, I could feel the changes in my attention span and the incessant feeling of needing to check my device. My love of deep reading, prayer, and solitude were becoming increasingly difficult. Today, much has changed in my life as a result of what I am about to share with you. I have relearned to enjoy the transformative power of solitude. I have rekindled my love for reading Scripture and all kinds of books. Most importantly, I have deepened my

relationship with my Creator and those around me through a mind that is able to focus again.

Just as you wouldn't embark on a journey without knowing where you're headed, you shouldn't live your life without clear focus and purpose. This book is your guide to reclaiming your attention and setting your course toward a life of deeper meaning, stronger faith, and true joy. Think of this book and your commitment to finish it as a manifesto for reclaiming your focus, your faith, and ultimately your life. In this age of distraction, commit now to put down your phone, look up, and join me on this journey. Together we will resist the pull of the digital world and embrace the peace, joy, and fulfillment that come from living in the presence of God.

Introduction

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

—Romans 12:2

*Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’:
aim at earth and you will get neither.*

—C.S. Lewis

“Grandpa, put down your phone! Look at this!”

Those words, spoken for the fourth time by my four-year-old grandson Flynn pierced through the digital fog enveloping my mind. To give my son and daughter-in-law a rare chance to spend some time away together, we had offered to watch our grandkids for the weekend. By the end of the weekend, after a full schedule of activities, I was exhausted. In a moment of fatigue, I sought refuge in my device, retreating from the real world into an endless stream of information and distractions.

“Huh?” I grunted, blinking as I surfaced from the depths of a never-ending scroll of news headlines, my mind far away from the room where I sat. Oblivious to the world around me, including the precious little boy standing a few feet away, I had missed the moment that truly mattered. After working on it for thirty minutes—an eternity for a four-year-old—Flynn was trying to unveil to me his finished Lego Star Wars Land Speeder, a proud accomplishment in his young world. He was inviting me to share in his wonder and joy. But instead of celebrating with him, I looked up only to notice my grandson turning away with tears in his eyes, a dejected child who had given up after desperately trying to regain

my focus. Flynn's plea was a wake-up call for me, a reminder of what truly matters and a commitment to regain control of my focus.

I'm sure you can relate to this scenario. We've all experienced the frustration and hurt of being ignored by someone engrossed in their phone, and we've all been guilty of doing the same to others. These moments of disconnection reveal a deeper issue in our lives: our struggle to maintain focus on what truly matters. Despite our best intentions, we often find ourselves drawn into the shallow allure of our devices, sacrificing meaningful interactions and experiences.

As an Information Systems professor at a Christian university, my dedication to studying technology and its impact on our lives is not merely theoretical. My own research on how to make technology more engaging, decades of experience working in the tech world, and personal interviews with industry insiders has allowed me to gain firsthand insights into the methods used to develop these technologies.

I have taught my students how to navigate this digital world responsibly and to cultivate a biblical worldview that prioritizes real-life connections over virtual ones. Yet despite all of this knowledge and experience, like the apostle Paul, I found myself in a battle between *knowledge* and *practice*. Paul's words in Romans 7:15–18 resonated deeply with me: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing." I knew the dangers of excessive screen time, but I struggled to apply that knowledge in my own life.

Join me on this journey: a journey to reclaim our focus from the attention economy that seeks to fragment it. It's a journey to reconnect with the abundant life Jesus promised, a life found not in the fleeting satisfaction of our devices but in the deep, lasting joy of spiritual practices like prayer, solitude, and reading the Bible. Since any battle must be won by offense and defense, this book is divided into three parts:

1. Offense: Learn what the attention economy is and how to diminish your need for distraction.
2. Defense: How to deepen your prayer, solitude, and deep reading in the attention economy.
3. Disconnecting from tech and reconnecting to the abundant life.

Part One. Offense: The Attention Economy and The Antidote to Distraction

In part one of the of the book we will first examine the systemic aspects of our technologies by looking at the attention economy and how it is contributing to your inability to focus. Specifically, we will see how millions of dollars and some of the brightest minds in the world are dedicated to capturing and maintaining your attention on your device. For example, we will see how specific design strategies used by big tech companies like the infinite scroll and algorithms can be used to capture and then maintain your attention. We will also learn to recognize the anatomy of our addictions and avoid the pull of getting our next “dopamine cookie” and avoid stress-inducing “cortisol loops.” Finally, we will see how the design of our tools shapes us toward values that are sometimes contrary to the fruit of the Spirit, which we want to see in our lives.

Second, in part one, we will reconnect with the abundant life as the untapped antidote to distraction: developing a life full of gifts, abilities, and activities that demand our full attention. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). This promise of abundant life is not about the quantity of our experiences but the quality of our connection with Him. It’s about finding joy and contentment in His presence, even as the world clamors for our attention. Though much has been written on the power of a digital detox, we will learn from both the research and our own personal expe-

riences that, by itself, this method generally falls short of our goals to engage deeply with our world and those around us. If you have ever experienced a digital detox, you know the pain, boredom, and mindlessness that is created when we choose to disconnect from our devices without something else to fill the vacuum of time we had previously allocated to our devices.

The critically unique point of this book is that before starting any digital detox, we must first create an abundant life—a life filled in pursuit of our unique giftings that require our complete attention. To do this, we will learn how to counter the pull of our devices through a powerful theory in the research called “flow.” Although the theory might sound like an eastern meditation practice, we will see that flow is something you have already experienced many times. We will start by learning how this type of extreme focus literally becomes an antidote to distraction. We will see how gamers, artists, and rock climbers all engage in activities that fill their life with complete focus and, critically, how this state of mind virtually eliminates the distractions of the attention economy. Using a powerful seven-step method starting with prayer, we will, like the man in Jesus’ parable of the pearl of great price, happily give away our distractions for the things we truly value.

Part Two. Defense: Elevating Solitude, Prayer, and Deep Reading in the Attention Economy

In part two, we will focus on the defensive front by learning how to view our technology biblically and how technology, if left unexamined, will fracture our ability to focus on the disciplines of our faith—solitude, prayer/meditation, and deep reading. We will start by defining technology biblically and then examine the importance of understanding the myth that our technologies are neutral, neither good nor bad. We will learn that the fight for our focus must be won by understanding the battle on two fronts—the individual and systemic. Individually, it is indeed

my responsibility to put down my phone when I am around my grandson and those I love. However, we will also learn that there is a systemic element to overcoming our addiction. Every tool, including our digital ones, influences how we perceive reality. In other words, we will learn that while we influence our tools, they in turn influence us in sometimes unhealthy and unexpected ways. The key to freedom is in recognizing the values inherent in the technologies and how these values gently nudge us closer toward or away from our own values.

Next, in part two, we will look at three significant ways our tech, if left unexamined, is fracturing our Christian practices of solitude, prayer, and reading.

Solitude: We are the first generation in history that is never truly alone. For even when we are alone, our devices constantly demand our attention. Researchers have identified this phenomenon as “solitude deprivation.” To counter solitude deprivation, we will, first, learn from Jesus’, Elijah’s, and King David’s examples as well as how the great political and business leaders in our country, including Thomas Jefferson, Bill Gates, and Steve Wozniak, have all stated the critical importance of solitude. Second, we will learn the specific ways the attention economy is designed to work against our desire for solitude and practical steps we can take to “tame our tech.” Finally, we will learn practical methods to carve out time for solitude in our lives by using the life changing one-hour daily digital fast and the transformative quarterly solitude retreat.

Prayer: We will explore the transformative research linking our attention to our prayer life. This chapter is informed by my advanced studies and personal interviews with spiritual leaders who have devoted their lives to the practice of prayer. We will learn that despite the endless distractions, developing three types of attention in our life is possible: focused attention, rote attention, and boredom. Yes, boredom. We will develop our focused attention through practical methods such as the prayer walk

and learning to “take captive every thought.” Finally, we will learn how to hear the still, small voice of God as we develop our brains with the value of rote attention tasks like taking a shower, doing the dishes, and gardening.

Deep reading: I commend you for taking the time for reading this book. In this chapter, we will see how the superficial, fast-paced nature of the digital world is physiologically rewiring our brains and making it more difficult to read deeply. We will learn that, in addition to more shallow reading, we are reading less. Combined, we will see the fascinating research on how this lack of reading is impacting our ability to empathize with others. Finally, we will look at practical ways we can recapture our love for deep reading and to cultivate a life centered on the eternal truths of Scripture.

Part Three. Disconnecting from Tech

In part three, we will learn how to complete a digital detox while we aggressively pursue our uniquely gifted passions. We will learn the three critical lessons to perform after the detox by looking at the Amish’s deliberate approach to selecting technologies that align with their values and rejecting those that negatively impact their faith or way of life. We will also see how adding “friction” is a powerful method shown to disrupt the automatic nature of device usage and encourage more mindful engagement with our technologies.

So let’s begin. Join me in putting down your phone. Let us look up and see our husbands, wives, kids, grandkids, and our brothers and sisters in Christ anew. Join me in reconnecting with the beauty of the life God has given us. It’s been too long. Together, we’ll learn how to resist the pull of the digital world and embrace the peace and fulfillment that come from living in the presence of God. Let’s reclaim our focus and live the abundant life Jesus calls us to. Let’s embrace the joy of missing out on the superficial and dive deep into the richness of His love. Welcome to

the journey of reclaiming our focus and discovering the abundant life in Christ!

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Romans 12:2. How does this verse challenge you to resist the influence of the attention economy? What practical steps can you take to “renew your mind” in today’s digital age?
2. How has the attention economy affected your ability to engage in deep spiritual practices like prayer or Bible study?
3. Discuss the ways in which your digital habits either help or hinder your walk with God. What changes could you make to align more closely with your spiritual goals?

1

Lost in Scroll: Why Focus Feels Impossible

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,
making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.*

—Ephesians 5:15–16

*For many of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith,
it is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied
that we will settle for a mediocre version of it.*

—John Ortberg

As a child, I was captivated by magic. The wonder of seeing a magician saw a woman in half, make coins disappear, or levitate objects before my very eyes left me in awe. I have wonderful memories of hours in the Disneyland magic shop, finding the perfect trick, followed by countless hours practicing the trick, and the final unveiling of the trick to all my friends and family. The beauty of a magic trick is in entertaining the audience by performing the seemingly impossible without the audience knowing how they are being influenced to behave.

One of my favorite tricks involved manipulating the audience's choices without their knowledge, and it never failed to leave the audience completely astounded. Here's how it worked: A person in the audience selected a card and inserted it back into the deck without my knowing the selected card. Using some sleight of hand, I moved that card to the top of the deck and then shuffled the cards, while being careful to keep the selected card on top. I then laid out the cards, face down, into four piles

without the audience knowing that I knew the exact location of the selected card and pile. My favorite part of the trick was what happened next—the point that the audience’s choices were seriously manipulated without their knowing. I instructed the audience to “pick two piles.” If the audience picked one of the piles that had their selected card, I would remove the other two piles. Conversely, if the audience picked the piles that did not have the selected card, I would remove those two piles. So no matter what piles the audience selected, I either removed or kept them to make sure the audience’s card would always be left. The key to this trick is that I was intentionally vague in saying, “Pick two piles,” instead of something like, “Pick two piles to remove.” I then continued this process until there was only one card remaining, which left the audience completely dumbfounded how they magically selected their own card from all the cards in the deck!

In my years spent researching the attention economy, I’ve found myself reflecting on this childhood love of magic when considering the complexities of our modern digital world. Today, tech companies have become the new magicians employing their own brand of “magic” to captivate our attention. But unlike the innocent wonder of childhood magic, the tricks used by these digital illusionists are designed to manipulate and exploit our cognitive processes. Their goal is not to amaze or entertain but to capture and hold our focus for profit—often without our even realizing the extent of their influence.

In the same way that I manipulated the audience to select their own card, I have learned that tech companies use sophisticated algorithms and psychological insights to manipulate us in order to keep us engaged with their platforms. Notifications, infinite scrolling, and personalized content streams are the digital equivalents of a magician’s flourish, drawing us deeper into their world and away from the real one. This modern magic preys on our natural tendencies and desires, turning our attention into a commodity that can be bought, sold, and manipulated for profit.

While my childhood experiences with magic were harmless and filled with joy, the magic of tech companies operates in a more insidious manner. It subtly alters our behaviors, reshapes our interactions, and diminishes our capacity for deep and meaningful engagement with others and our faith.

Reasons for Studying the Attention Economy

I believe there are at least three reasons for you to join me in my journey to understand why it is important to understand the attention economy. First, we need to understand that a significant reason for our lack of focus is not our fault. The path to renewed focus certainly involves making personal changes to our lives, but there are systemic issues that we must understand in order to better identify and successfully make these changes. Second, understanding this problem helps us understand the impact the attention economy is making on our world. Retaining and focusing our attention is arguably the most valuable endeavor for the brilliant minds in our world to continue to be able to live out lives in the image of our God in creating new products and services. Finally, as we clearly understand the attention economy, we can work together to find solutions, both within the church and for society as a whole.

Introduction: Defining the Attention Economy

The term “attention economy” was first coined by Michael H. Goldhaber in his 1997 article, “The Attention Economy and the Net,” published in the journal *First Monday*.^[1] Goldhaber explored how the internet and digital technologies were shifting the economic landscape from one focused on material goods to one centered around capturing and monetizing human attention. His article laid the groundwork for understanding how attention became a scarce and valuable commodity in the digital age.

More recently, the term “attention capitalism” builds on the concept of the attention economy referring to the economic system in which human attention is treated as a scarce commodity and monetized by businesses, primarily through advertising. This model is prevalent in the digital age, where platforms like Google, Facebook, and X generate revenue by capturing and retaining user attention. The goal is to maximize the amount of time users spend on their platforms, which in turn increases the value of the advertising space. According to Tim Wu, the scholar who coined the term attention capitalism, these companies leverage advanced technology and psychological insights to keep users engaged, often at the cost of their mental health and well-being.^[2] This model has profound implications for individuals and society, including Christians, who are called to live mindful and intentional lives.

Big Tech and the Motivation to Capture Attention

As of this writing, the combined revenue for Google in the last five years is 1.192 *trillion* dollars.^[3] Have you ever considered why companies like Google, and others in the attention economy like Facebook, and X, are so successful without ever asking for a penny from you? The way these companies have been so successful is by applying some sleight of hand to capture your attention without your knowing it and then selling it to the businesses who pay to deliver targeted advertising to you based on what Google knows about you. Tristan Harris, a former developer for Google and now founder of the Ethical Center for Humanity, has summarized this well, saying, “If you’re not paying for the product, you are the product.”^[4]

To illustrate how this works, consider an example we are all familiar with: researching and purchasing a product online. In this case, consider the experience of my wife and me when we needed to replace our couch and loveseat. We began our search using Google with search terms like

“furniture stores near me.” We shopped online, looking at the inventory of couches in nearby stores. We also used Facebook Marketplace to look into gently used options. Within one day, my wife noticed that the abundance of ads in her social media accounts were dedicated to sofas and loveseats. Another common example is how we may comment, “I swear my phone hears my conversations,” as the ads delivered to us are seemingly magically targeted to our interests—even in cases where we believe we haven’t supplied the information online.

So, what sort of sleight of hand are the digital magicians employing to do this trick? This seamless targeting happens because companies like Google and Facebook track our online activities, gathering data on our interests, preferences, and behaviors. Every search query, website visit, and social media interaction is logged and analyzed to build a comprehensive profile of each user. This data is then used to deliver personalized advertisements, ensuring that the ads we see are relevant to our current needs and interests. For businesses, like those selling couches in my example, this targeted advertising is incredibly valuable as it allows them to reach potential customers who are most likely to be interested in their products. The success of this model is reflected in Google’s massive revenue, demonstrating the power and profitability of the attention economy.

Effects of Attention Economy

At first glance, we might conclude there really isn’t a problem with this business model. After all, what is the problem with Google understanding my digital profile and helping me in my search for a couch or other products it knows about me? The problem is that the attention economy relies solely on your engagement. In order to build your digital profile, these companies employ some of the brightest minds in the world to capture and keep your attention resulting in endless distractions from the people and things you value most in life. The more time you spend on

these platforms, the more data they generate, which in turn can be monetized through targeted advertising. The research is clear that the end result of the attention economy is addiction and the inability to focus, along with stress, anger, and intolerance.

Internet Addiction

The most vulnerable to the effects of the addictive nature of the attention economy are our young people. Recent research has shown several troubling conclusions. One comprehensive study tracked the smartphone use of 203 teenagers, revealing a median smartphone use of more than four hours per day, with some teens using their phones for more than sixteen hours a day.^[5] These devices were picked up and checked a median of fifty-one times per day, with the highest number of pickups reaching 498 in a single day. This frequent engagement with smartphones is driven by numerous notifications—half of the participants received 237 or more notifications daily, leading to constant distractions and interruptions.

The content consumption patterns highlight the captivating power of certain apps. For instance, TikTok was used by 50 percent of the participants for a median of nearly two hours per day, with some users spending upwards of seven hours daily on the platform. The app's design, which involves automatic video playback and highly personalized content recommendations, ensures minimal user effort and maximum engagement. This irresistible draw is further amplified by the algorithm's ability to quickly adapt to user preferences, making the app even more addictive.

In a broader context, digital consumption has dramatically increased over the years. A significant percentage of teens are heavily reliant on their devices, with 85 percent of teens aged thirteen to seventeen using YouTube, 72 percent using Instagram, and 69 percent using Snapchat.^[6] Gloria Mark, one of the leading researchers in attention, reminds us these types of statistics are especially troubling for youth because their

self-control and executive function are not yet mature. These functions develop throughout childhood, reaching similar competencies to adults at around age ten.^[7] In a study that examined twenty-two students participating in a twenty-four hour fast from their phones, students used terms like “unbearable,” “miserable,” “jittery,” “very anxious,” and “in withdrawal” to describe the experience.^[8]

Lest we think the problem is limited to our youth, the reality is we have all become addicted to our smartphones. One study showed that the compulsion to engage in social media can be more difficult to resist than the desire for tobacco, coffee, alcohol, and eating.^[9] Another study showed the average person checks their cellphone 144 times per day!^[10] This equates to once every ten minutes! This relentless drive for engagement has resulted in a staggering 40 percent of the population exhibiting some form of internet-based addiction, with many individuals unable to imagine life without their smartphones. Most of these are not conscious choices. Rather, the companies creating the platforms on our devices are getting better at keeping us addicted through a chemical called “dopamine.”

Anatomy of Addiction: Dopamine and Cortisol

While there are many facets to being addicted to our devices, two chemicals play a huge role through physiological impacting our body: dopamine and cortisol. Dopamine has been termed the “molecule of more” because the more we trigger the release of dopamine, the more we will want our next “shot.” Meurisse reminds us that, contrary to popular belief, dopamine is not itself a pleasure chemical.^[11] Dopamine is a neurotransmitter which makes us *anticipate* pleasure. It is the same chemical that is generated when we anticipate eating or addictive drugs. The reality, however, is that the generation of the chemical does not mean you actually receive the expected pleasure. Generally, the experience is the op-

posite with technologies such as social media notifications. When you see a notification, you anticipate a reward you will receive, such as seeing likes or comments to your posts, which triggers dopamine in your brain. When you check your stats on your financial portfolio or your performance at work, you expect a reward from seeing positive numbers. When you visit YouTube, you expect to see interesting or engaging videos. All of these experiences trigger the release of dopamine. The reality is that we are generally left feeling empty and unfulfilled.

We can see a good example of how this cycle works when looking at how dopamine functions for drug and alcohol addicts. Addiction generates a continuous triggering of the release of dopamine, which ultimately strengthens tolerance to this stimulation. As a result, the drug addict needs progressively stronger doses to experience the same sense of pleasure. Even after the addict realizes the drug has ruined his life, the brain continues to stimulate dopamine because it remembers it soothed a need in the past. In the same way, as we begin to realize the shallow and negative aspects of technologies in our life, we continue to want more—just as we did when they still made us happy.

The other chemical, cortisol, is a hormone released by the adrenal glands in response to stress. It is part of the body's fight-or-flight response mechanism and plays a crucial role in regulating various bodily functions, including metabolism, immune response, and stress response. In the context of our technology, researchers^[12] have studied cortisol loops. The cortisol loop refers to the cycle of stress and behavior that can be perpetuated by the frequent checking of our smartphones. Here is how it works:

Triggering Event: When you receive a notification or hear a phone alert, the body responds by releasing cortisol.

Stress Response: The release of cortisol triggers a stress response, leading to heightened alertness and a sense of urgency.

Behavioral Reaction: To alleviate this stress, you check your phone, seeking relief by addressing the notification.

Temporary Relief: While checking the phone might provide temporary relief, it often introduces new information or stimuli that can trigger further stress.

Cycle Continuation: This leads to a repetitive cycle where you continually check your phone, leading to a perpetual loop of cortisol release and stress. Neuroendocrinologists have highlighted how even just the sight or sound of a phone can trigger cortisol release, even if the notification is not immediately checked. This creates a loop where the stress of potential notifications drives the need to check the phone, which in turn leads to more stress.

Fragmented Attention

The attention economy is having broad effects on our ability to focus. Studies show that the average duration of attention on a screen before switching to another screen is declining. Gloria Mark's research reveals that our attention spans while using digital devices have become extremely short, averaging about forty-seven seconds on any given screen.^[13] This decline in attention span is not just limited to work environments but extends to personal and social contexts as well. The frequent switching of tasks and interruptions caused by notifications can lead to cognitive overload and stress. Mark's research has shown that multitasking and continuous partial attention result in decreased performance, increased errors, and higher stress levels.^[14]

In researching this book, I interviewed Samuel James, author of *Digital Liturgies* and a number of other excellent books. James pointed out that the fragmentation of attention is not just a personal issue but also a cultural one. There is something about working on a screen that makes it more difficult to focus. And especially with the advance of artificial in-

telligence taking on increasing roles, there needs to be a cultural shift in defining “fulfilling” work, a shift towards a reevaluation of what the abundant life looks like in our vocations. James explained it to me like this:

If you’re a construction worker or contractor or something like that, then your default might be different than an information worker. So, an information worker might actually have to think more holistically about how to reenter their attention. . . . There is something about physical work and the tactile experience that actually enables and empowers being in the moment more than information work.

In general, I think we all sense this feeling of losing control of our attention. How many times have we regretted tuning out with our phone while our child pleads for our attention? Or how often do we regret simply enjoying a moment without the urge to take the picture so we can share it with others? Tristan Harris, in a *60 Minutes* interview, explained that our lack of control is not entirely due to a lack of self-discipline.^[15] It is, instead, because billions of dollars have been invested to make this outcome inevitable. In the interview Harris said, “There’s always this narrative that technology’s neutral. And it’s up to us to choose how we use it. This is just not true. . . . It’s not neutral. They want you to use it in particular ways and for long periods of time. Because that’s how they make their money.” Harris is now a leader in providing growing awareness that the attention economy drives companies like Google into a “race to the bottom of the brain stem.”^[16] The key to improving our lives and our focus, therefore, is to better understand the tactics used by these companies.

Anger and Intolerance

Aside from internet addiction and lack of focus, the research is increasingly clear that culturally we are becoming more angry and less tolerant of other viewpoints. For example, Jonathon Hari discusses research in his book on how the way to get the most views on YouTube is to include words like “hates,” “obliterates,” “slams,” or “destroys” in your title.^[17] Words that will increase your retweet rate are “attack,” “bad,” and “blame.” There is a popular saying on the internet that sums up the research well: “If it’s more enraging, it’s more engaging.”

Besides fostering anger in ourselves, and ultimately in society, social media platforms contribute to the creation of knowledge silos or “echo chambers” that can foster intolerance.^[18] These sites are driven by algorithms which are designed to maximize user engagement by curating content that aligns our individual preferences and beliefs. Consequently, we are exposed primarily to information that reinforces our existing viewpoints, creating these echo chambers where dissenting perspectives are rarely encountered.

Designed for Addiction

The addictive nature of the attention economy is intricately tied to the design strategies employed by technology companies to capture and sustain our focus. In 2009, Stanford researcher B. J. Fogg introduced “behavior design,” a discipline rooted in the principles of behaviorism.^[19] This approach posits that behavior change occurs when three elements converge: motivation (wanting to do it), ability (being able to do it), and prompts (being triggered to do it). Fogg’s behavior design draws from classic behaviorist principles, much like B. F. Skinner’s work with operant conditioning and reinforcement, which demonstrated how behaviors could be shaped through rewards and punishments.

Fogg’s behavior design framework has been used to create highly engaging digital experiences by leveraging intermittent rewards and other per-

suasive techniques to capture and retain users' attention. This methodology has raised ethical questions about the responsibility of tech designers in creating products that can lead to addictive behaviors and diminish users' control over their attention and time.

Harris and many other tech leaders today studied under Fogg at Stanford and learned how to apply these principles to the design of digital products. Harris, who was previously a Google project manager, has since become vocal about the ethical concerns surrounding these techniques, particularly in how they exploit users' psychological vulnerabilities to increase engagement. He likens the repetitive checking of apps and notifications to Skinner's rats, which were conditioned to press levers in the hope of receiving unpredictable rewards.^[20]

There are at least four key design strategies used by the big tech companies to keep us engaged: the like button, infinite scroll, notifications, the like button, and algorithms.

Like button: The very essence of the like button, established by Facebook in 2009, has redefined online social interaction, creating a simple yet powerful tool that allows people to show their appreciation or support for literally any piece of content. The problem with the like button is that studies have found that chasing likes stimulates the reward centers of the brain, most notably through the release of dopamine, with mechanisms very much akin to those seen in gambling. This can cause compulsive behaviors where we continuously attempt to be validated by likes and get into a loop of feedback that strengthens social comparisons and in some instances leads to anxiety and depression, especially among the teen and young adult populations.^[21] The reward centers in the brains of adolescents are especially sensitive ; this means that the amount activated in response to 'likes' associates with greater sensitivity to social rewards and reinforcement with use.^[22] The continuous quest for approval leads to checking social media profiles again and again, thus reducing attention

span and at the same time heightening feelings of inadequacy.^[23] The good news is that research has also shown that decreasing the use of social media and, therefore, exposure to these cycles of validation can help decrease feelings of loneliness and depression.^[24]

Infinite scroll: Aza Raskin, now co-founder of “Center for Humane Technology,” was a designer and technologist and inventor the concept of infinite scroll, a feature now ubiquitous across social media platforms and various websites. Infinite scroll allows users to continue consuming content without the need to click to the next page, creating a seamless and uninterrupted flow of information. While the design was initially intended to enhance user experience by making content more accessible, Raskin has since expressed concerns about its impact on our lives. In Hari’s book *Stolen Focus*, Raskin discusses how he has calculated that infinite scroll increases time spent on sites like X by approximately 50 percent, which on a global scale, amounts to the equivalent of 200,000 human lifetimes being consumed by scrolling rather than engaging in other activities.^[25]

Notifications: Notifications are designed to create a sense of urgency and continuous engagement. Big tech companies rely on these design elements as comparable to the intermittent reinforcement used in gambling, as highlighted by B. F. Skinner’s behavioral psychology principles, where unpredictable rewards encourage repeated behavior.^[26] These notifications serve as constant prompts to return to our devices, creating a cycle of frequent engagement and distraction. This pattern is exacerbated by the fact that apps like Snapchat and Discord send numerous notifications, encouraging users to continually check their phones throughout the day.

The like button: The Facebook like button, introduced in 2009, was a game-changing feature designed to simplify user interactions on the plat-

form. Initially intended as a way to boost user engagement, the button quickly became a staple across social media platforms, influencing how content has been consumed and shared. The psychological and emotional effects of the like button have been widely discussed. Experts have linked the feature to increased anxiety and depression, particularly among teens. The pursuit of likes creates a cycle of dependency similar to gambling, where users experience a dopamine rush from receiving likes, reinforcing the need to constantly check and update their social media profiles.^[27]

Algorithms: Algorithms play a critical role in sustaining attention by learning and adapting to user preferences. For example, TikTok's algorithm quickly adapts to a user's interests, ensuring that the content served is highly engaging and relevant.^[28] This low-friction interaction, where videos start playing automatically without requiring any user action, makes it easy for users to spend hours on the platform without even realizing it. The types of algorithms vary, but they all have one thing in common: They will show you things to ensure that you keep your eyes on the screen.

Confessions of Big Tech

One possible reaction to this research is that the tech companies are not knowingly trying to generate addiction to our devices. Indeed, the people behind these companies are some of the brightest people in the world. And they certainly seem ethical. That said, when we look closely at these companies, the overriding business model of capturing our attention at all costs has been the *stated focus since the beginning*.

As evidence, consider the following powerful quote from Sean Parker, founder of Napster and first president of Facebook, regarding the thought process in building these applications:

How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible? . . . We need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever. And that's going to get you to contribute more content, and that's going to get you . . . more likes and comments. . . . It's a social-validation feedback loop . . . exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology. . . . The inventors, creators—it's me, it's Mark [Zuckerberg], it's Kevin Systrom on Instagram, it's all of these people—understood this consciously. . . . And we did it anyway.^[29]

Similarly, Chamath Palihapitiya, the former Vice President for User Growth at Facebook, has been a vocal critic of the very platform he helped to grow. In various public statements, Palihapitiya has expressed “tremendous guilt” for the role he played in creating tools that he believes are “ripping apart the social fabric of how society works.”^[30] He has highlighted the manipulative power built into social media systems; particularly emphasizing the “short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops” that social media platforms use to keep users engaged. These loops, driven by features such as likes and comments, are designed to exploit psychological vulnerabilities, resulting in increased engagement but also fostering misinformation, lack of civil discourse, and societal division. Palihapitiya has also pointed out the broader implications of these practices, including their global impact. He mentioned specific incidents, such as the spread of hoaxes via WhatsApp leading to violent outcomes, to illustrate how these platforms can be manipulated by bad actors to achieve harmful ends. His candid admissions have contributed to a growing awareness of the ethical and societal implications of social media and the need for more responsible design and regulation of these technologies.^[31] Other Facebook developers, Justin Rosenstein and

Leah Pearlman, who were part of the team that developed the like button, later expressed regret over its far-reaching negative impacts. They noted that the button encourages users to seek validation and popularity, which can lead to addiction and emotional distress.

Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, limited his children's use of technology, including the iPad, despite it's being one of his company's flagship products.^[32] He believed in the importance of limiting screen time to foster healthier habits and real-world interactions. Similarly, Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, did not allow his children to have cell phones until they were fourteen years old and imposed strict limits on their screen time. Gates emphasized the need for balance, and ensured that devices were not used during family meals in order to encourage more personal interactions. Finally, Chris Anderson, the former editor of *Wired* magazine and CEO of 3D Robotics, also set stringent tech usage rules for his children, acknowledging the addictive nature of these technologies. He mentioned that having witnessed the dangers of technology firsthand, he wanted to prevent his kids from falling into the same traps.^[33]

Attention Economy for Christians

For Christians, the attention economy poses significant challenges to living out our faith. Jay Kim's book *Analog Christian* is helpful in contrasting how the attention economy is often at odds with fruit of the spirit. In Galatians 5:22–25 Paul writes, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”

The last verse is critical. In order to live by the Spirit, we must keep in step with the Spirit. Kim points out that keeping in step with the Spirit

requires us to daily choose the fruits of the Spirit rather than what the attention economy has to offer. Specifically, we can choose to cultivate fruit in multiple areas that the attention economy is designed to work against.

Self-Control over Reckless Indulgence

As we have seen, the attention economy has been designed to make us creatures of reckless indulgence, ever seeking the next hit of dopamine. Tim Keller said, “Self-control is the ability to do the important thing rather than the urgent thing.”^[34] As Christians, we must ask the Spirit of God to help us develop the gift of self-control and undo the urgent and endless pull of our digital world. The Proverbs are full of reminders to develop self-control and develop hearts that are focused on doing the important things in life rather than the urgent things.

Patience over Impatience

We will learn more in future chapters how the internet and the technologies of our day have impacted our ability for patience in areas such as reading. Many of us struggle to sit in quiet meditation without feeling the need to fill the silence in our minds with digital dopamine cookies. Biblically, we must learn to fight against this urge and wait on Him. “The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord” (Lamentations 3:25–26). Kim reminds us what we all intuitively know within our heart:

The stuff of life that truly matters is never that accessible. And yet, paradoxically, it’s much more accessible than we can imagine. But it’s found not in the easy and convenient comforts of online life. The things that truly matter—life-giving relationships, the sacrifices that infuse life with meaning, destiny-defining struggles and triumphs—these things and more re-

quire patience. They require a willingness to enter into pain and find on the other side a life truly worth living.^[35]

Joy over Comparison

We have all heard or experienced the term FOMO: Fear of Missing Out. It refers to the anxiety or fear that we feel, especially with social media, when we are missing out on social events, experiences, or interactions that others are enjoying. The attention economy perpetuates the problem as research has shown that social media significantly increases depression and loneliness; especially for young girls and women.^[36] Our perception of our own appearance decreases as we see the curated images of others who seem to have a much better body, life, job, or you fill in the blank. Kim writes, “Genuine joy is not in someplace or in becoming someone. Rather, joy is found and made complete as we remain in Jesus, the vine, and the giver of true joy.”^[37]

In response to FOMO, I propose that we work to develop JOMO, a term growing in popularity that stands for Joy of Missing Out. JOMO embraces the satisfaction and contentment that comes from choosing to step away from the hectic pace of the attention economy and the constant connectivity that technology often imposes. In contrast to constant comparison, we can instead choose to disconnect from addictive behaviors, embrace solitude, read, pray, and fully pursue the abundant life that God has promised us instead.

Key Points

- ◇ The attention economy employs its own magic tricks to captivate and manipulate our focus.

- ◇ Take the first step toward regaining control over your attention by understanding these digital manipulations.
- ◇ Evaluate your digital habits and begin the process of reducing the influence of these manipulations on your daily life.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Ephesians 5:15–16. How does this passage relate to your use of digital devices? What changes can you make to “make the most of every opportunity” in your daily life?
2. Have you noticed a decline in your ability to focus? What practices or habits have contributed to this, and how might you reverse the trend?
3. Discuss the concept of “fragmented focus.” How can understanding this concept help you reclaim your attention?

2

Flowing into Abundance: The True Cure for a Distracted Mind

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.

When a man found it, he hid it again,

and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

—Matthew 13:44

The settled happiness and security which we all desire,

God withholds from us by the very nature of the world:

but joy, pleasure, and merriment, He has scattered broadcast.

—C.S. Lewis

Bank tellers and financial experts spend an extensive amount of time learning how to detect counterfeit bills. To do this, one might assume that they study common attributes of counterfeit bills. The reality is that they become experts in detecting counterfeits by studying the real thing—authentic currency. In the same way the key to developing an abundant life is less about managing the decoys of digital distractions that surround us and more about learning how to detect and pursue the real thing—abundant life.

The following powerful writing by Sheridan Voysey. It is titled “The Creed” and is the closest example of a biblical description of the abundant life.

The hand that spins the galaxies brought me into being.

The One who holds the stars has made me his own.

I am God's child. My life is rich, my days are sacred.

*I am held by a love that's wider and higher than the farthest edges of this
expanding universe.*

I am a pilgrim in this world, in search of wisdom and wonder.

I will take new adventures. And follow God into the unknown.

*What I achieve is not as important as the person I become. So, I will seek to
imitate the Nail-Pierced One.*

*I will step in the direction of my strengths and talents. They are Spirit-giv-
en tools for my God-given tasks.*

*I will pay attention to my persistent aspirations. They could be the whispers
of God.*

I will serve all I can and walk deeply with a few.

I will aim for great things but leave my legacy to God.

*The path is long and the terrain at times hard. Still: I will not wish for an-
other's life.*

*I will take my place, play my part. Something important will be missed if I
don't.^[38]*

In reading these powerful words, I am both inspired and convicted. I am inspired to find my true joy and abundant life as a husband, father, and academic. Yet the words remind me of the many times that my life seems to, quite honestly, be missing something. I think the vast majority of us living in today's digital world have felt this too. Mark Fisher, a British cultural critic and humanist, put a name to this feeling: depressive hedonia. In his book, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* he explains that

the feeling that something is missing is derived from our culture's inability to do anything except pursue pleasure.^[39] The culture, according to Fisher, is rooted in a relentless pursuit of pleasure and instant gratification and that this pursuit ultimately leads to a feeling of emptiness and dissatisfaction.

The digital world and the attention economy provide a temporary but constant flow of "pleasure" for us to pursue. The irony is that this pursuit leads us to be continually distracted and ultimately unfulfilled. In *The Shallows* Nicholas Carr writes how the internet has turned us into "lab rats constantly pressing levers to get tiny pellets of social or intellectual nourishment."^[40] Any "pleasure" we desire is but a scroll, click or swipe away.

The reality is that the abundant life is not found in the scroll, click, or swipe. It is also not found by going through digital detox. When we try to unplug from social media for a day or week, we are often left with a void of empty time that we previously filled with our devices. The result is we feel cut off from the people and friendships around us. The research seems to support the futility of hoping a digital detox alone will solve our problems. Cal Newport is a bestselling author on the topic and summarizes his research this way: "I've become convinced that what you need instead is a full-fledged philosophy of technology use, rooted in your deep values, that provides clear answers to the questions of what tools you should use and how you should use them and, equally important, enables you to confidently ignore everything else."^[41]

I couldn't agree more. We need a philosophy of technology use rooted in our deep values. For the Christian, our deep values are derived from the Word of God. The thesis of this book, therefore, is that the abundant life is found in pursuing with all our being the disciplines found in the Bible such as solitude, prayer, and meditation. Through these disciplines we learn who we are in our Creator's eyes and, therefore, the meaning of

our existence. It is only then that we are empowered to reject the trinkets of the culture's digital pleasures and confidently replace the time we previously used for the mindless pursuit of pleasure with tasks that create meaning in our life.

Phase 1: Reconnect with Your Gifts and Passions

In the parable of the pearl of great price, Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44–46).

The key point in the parable is that the man in the parable happily gave away his possessions because they were a distraction from what he valued—the treasure. Mahatma Gandhi, in talking about a life of voluntary simplicity, is attributed as saying, "Only give up a thing when you want some other condition so much the thing no longer has any attraction for you, or when it seems to interfere with that which is more great desired."^[42]

The first step to reject the pull of our tech and enter into the abundant life Jesus described is for us to identify and pursue His kingdom in a way that makes us willingly give up everything else. So how exactly do we develop this type of passion for His kingdom that leads us to willingly reject the modern distractions of our day? Stay with me, and we will explore some significant research that will help us develop powerful passions for the kingdom and experience the abundant life. But before we get to that, let me share an unlikely topic of my study in grad school that ultimately led me to find a path to my passions: the study of gamers.

As a young child I was, like the vast majority youth, captured and addicted to video games. I am dating myself here, but I have wonderful mem-

ories of playing games on Atari and later Commodore 64. I spent countless hours, along with every other kid on the block, completely captured by games like PacMan, Donkey Kong, and Asteroids. Every day brought a new challenge for me to get to the next level of the game or see my name appear on a leaderboard. Like so many gamers today, four hours of gaming would feel like twenty minutes.

Fast forward to grad school, I was interested in researching ways technology could improve both academic and business goals. This led into research on developing “user engagement” in information systems and a concept called “gamification.” Gamification is defined as the addition of game-like elements such as leaderboards, points, or levels to non-game applications.^[43] The easiest example of gamification is a fitness app that tracks your progress toward your fitness goals and sometimes compares your performance with others.

The concept of gamification made perfect sense to me. I could instantly see the power of how adding gamification elements such as leaderboards or levels to non-game applications could generate more engagement with the information system. During graduate school, I was also working full time as a professor teaching online courses in information systems that relied heavily on online discussions for students to engage with the course. In several of these courses, students reported to me that the online discussion board was unchallenging and, therefore, often ignored. In thinking of how to make the online discussion board more interesting, I wondered about the potential power of adding gamification elements, specifically leaderboards and digital badges. Without going into all of the details, the results were astonishing. I completed multiple studies and a dissertation showing that adding gamification elements to a leaderboard resulted in significant increases to both the quantity of posts and quality of the posts as reflected in overall grades in the course. Simply put, students were much more engaged in discussions that used gamification.

There is a powerful concept that explains the reasons why my students, and anyone who has participated in a form of gamification, becomes more engaged with technology: flow theory. Flow theory, developed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, describes a mental state of complete absorption in an activity, where a person loses track of time and is fully engaged in the task at hand.^[44] Though the name might lead one to believe it is an Eastern meditation practice, it is not. It is an experience you are already familiar with and could be simply described as those times when you felt you are totally focused and “in the zone.” Csikszentmihalyi identifies several key characteristics of flow:

1. **Intense Focus and Concentration:** During flow, individuals experience a heightened state of concentration, where distractions fade away, and attention is solely focused on the activity.
2. **Merging of Action and Awareness:** There is a seamless integration of action and awareness, where individuals feel at one with what they are doing.
3. **Loss of Self-consciousness:** Self-awareness diminishes, and individuals become less concerned with themselves and more with the activity.
4. **Sense of Control:** Participants feel a sense of mastery and control over the task, even if it is challenging.
5. **Intrinsic Reward:** The activity itself is rewarding, providing deep satisfaction and joy.

As I thought about this theory, I thought back to my childhood and the way time would fly by as I pursued the next level on the newest game. The research on flow theory shows that gamers enter a state of flow when

they are deeply immersed in a game that provides the right balance of challenge and skill. Leaderboards, and other gamification elements such as digital badges or points, play a significant role in facilitating flow by providing clear goals and immediate feedback through three aspects that promote engagement:

1. **Clear Objectives:** Games with clear goals and objectives help players focus their efforts and understand what needs to be achieved.
2. **Immediate Feedback:** Leaderboards and in-game feedback systems offer real-time responses to players' actions, allowing them to adjust their strategies and stay engaged.
3. **Balanced Challenges:** Games that match the player's skill level with appropriate challenges help maintain flow. Too easy, and the game becomes boring; too hard, and it becomes frustrating.^[45]

Are you still with me? If not, the research on this is clear: *Flow theory is not limited to games. It has powerful applications to many other life domains.*

Artists, musicians, and performers often describe flow as a state of effortless creativity, where they lose track of time and become one with their art. Athletes frequently report being in flow during competitions when they are fully immersed in the physical and mental demands of their sport. Professionals often enter a state of flow when they are engaged in tasks that are meaningful, challenging, and align with their skills. For instance, a software developer might experience flow while coding, or a writer while crafting a story.

Another powerful example in my life is fishing. Much of this book was written while on sabbatical in the Sierra Nevada mountains. When I

wasn't writing the book, I would take a break and fish on the Hamilton Branch of Lake Almanor. The summer fishing here is some of the best in the world. As I wrote about flow states, I realized my time spent fishing was a powerful example of flow. While there were many people fishing on the creek, absolutely nobody was checking their phones. I believe this underscores the critical point of this book: *There is tremendous power in filling your life with flow states as an antidote to the mindless distractions we find on our phones.*

While fishing, I find it hard to even think about taking time to eat. Time is lost on everyone fishing along this stream; they're all fully focused on catching fish. What exactly is it that puts everyone fishing here on Lake Almanor into flow? I believe the answer is because it perfectly meets the three conditions of entering a flow state. First, there is a clear objective: catch fish. Second, there is immediate feedback. During this time of year, there are thousands of fish in this stream and my bobber consistently provides me with clear feedback no more than once every ten minutes letting me know the fish are interested in what's on my hook. Finally, the challenge is appropriate. If I were able to catch my limit easily within one hour, I may not be as focused. Conversely, if the fish were so big that I couldn't land them or so little that they weren't bigger than the bait, I would give up. The challenge/skill balance of the activity seems to be set perfectly to ensure that I dedicate my full attention to the task.

In all of these examples, we experience flow when we enter into a deep focus on the task at hand that we are passionate about—the exact opposite mental state of checking our phones for the latest notification or YouTube video. Flow stands in stark contrast to the distracted state perpetuated by the attention economy. While distractions fragment our attention and diminish our ability to focus, flow consolidates our mental resources, leading to deep engagement and fulfillment in at least three ways:

1. **Enhanced Focus:** Flow eliminates distractions by demanding full attention and engagement in the activity. In general, we are vulnerable to distractions whenever we work on a task that fails to interest us or hold our attention. Distractions can take two forms: internal and external. Internal distractions include things like lack of self-confidence or allowing our minds to wander. External distractions include everything outside of our minds, such as our phones, people around us, and other external interruptions. Flow states provide the superpower ability to ignore the world around us and focus fully on the things that matter.

2. **Deep Satisfaction:** Unlike the fleeting gratification from social media or other distractions, flow provides intrinsic rewards that lead to lasting satisfaction. *The key element of a flow state is elevated contentment with our current situation.* Our devices attempt to offer us satisfaction but always leave us wanting more. A life filled with multiple flow states is one that aligns with our interests and, therefore, generates deep satisfaction.

3. **Productivity and Mastery:** Flow enhances productivity and fosters a sense of mastery, as we become fully engaged in improving our skills and achieving our goals.

From a Christian perspective, the concept of flow aligns beautifully with the idea of living an abundant life. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Here is one of the most critical points of this book: *Just as flow requires intense focus on an activity, an abundant Christian life involves focusing our hearts and minds on God through tasks leading to the deep satisfaction that can only be found in communing with our Creator through tasks such as prayer, reading, and solitude.*

In other words, the most fulfilling moments often happen when our body or mind is pushed to its maximum capacity in a voluntary effort to achieve something challenging and meaningful. Interestingly, the tasks that can put us into flow are often more enjoyable than free time because they include built-in goals, feedback mechanisms, and challenges, all of which encourage engagement and concentration. In contrast, free time is unstructured and requires more effort to shape into something enjoyable. We thrive when deeply immersed in challenging activities. Aligning your life around the experience of flow, as inspired by Jesus' calling to live an abundant life, is a proven path to profound satisfaction.

When we lie on our deathbed, we will not be thinking of the number of likes we had on a post, but rather the tasks that required sacrifice and dedication—tasks that kept us completely engaged. Kim poignantly describes how these tasks are generally the ones that require sacrifice:

Genuine joy comes alive in meaningful connection, not only to God the giver of joy but also to one another. We congratulate the birth of a child. Blood, sweat, tears that lead to joy. We congratulate the marriage of a couple. Time, energy, cost that lead to joy. We congratulate the graduation of a student. Sacrifice and discipline that lead to joy. This is what the blessed life looks like. Blood, sweat, tears, time, energy, cost, sacrifice, discipline—all leading to joy. It's a far cry from the cultural pursuit of happiness, where most attention is given to minimizing pain and maximizing pleasure. Though we expect the American ideal of the pursuit of happiness to lead us to joy, it is in fact struggle that leads to blessing, which then leads to joy. Feelings of happiness on the near side of the very real pain and struggle of life is a thin and flimsy set of pleasures. But when we travel through the very real pain and struggle of life, we discover blessing on the far side of the pain and struggle, undergirded and buoyed by the joy of the Lord.^[46]

Finding Your Flow

To find your flow state, you need to choose one-to-three goals that align with your passions and allow you to further the kingdom of God in your own heart and/or in others. The goals should be meaningful to you and should push you to the edge of your abilities. You will know you have created these conditions and then entered a flow state because you will feel purely present in the moment and will have a loss of self-consciousness. You are like the little me who was lost in achieving the next level on the game.

For many of us, finding the tasks that further the kingdom of God and also align with our passions might be difficult at first. The disciplines described in this book—prayer, solitude, and reading—are all ways that we can develop our attention. Nature walks, journaling, serving others, and worship are all examples that might be a source for your flow state. Writing requires me to completely block out all distractions and focus completely. I will often go to a coffee shop to remove myself from the distractions at home and will dedicate a specified amount of time to writing. Deep reading is another example of a flow state I enjoy. Both of these allow me to focus deeply on one thing. Combined, both deep reading and the writing of this book have been transformative in helping my faith in God. And hopefully the writing of this book will help you grow in your faith.

Other examples of how you can integrate flow states into almost any area of your life include the following:

Flow at work: Distractions at work can seem, at times, impossible to control. Urgent emails and texts, interruptions from coworkers, and notifications on instant messaging are just a few of the many ways we fail to focus. The good news is that you can build flow into any experience at your job.

Household activities: The tasks that you complete at home can be developed into flow states. These could be home improvement projects, cleaning, reading, playing an instrument, a painting or other form of artwork, a novel you have dreamed of writing, cooking a new dish with a recipe you have been excited to use, games for the family, creating or maintaining a garden, whittling, fishing, hiking, and reading deeply.

Exercise

/Sports: Athletes report that when they're in a flow state, their movements seem effortless to them. The experience is generally described as a calmness related to other areas of life and an intense focus during the game. They also report a greater sense of control and confidence as they come to realize they are in the zone and doing well.^[47]

Steps to Achieve Flow

Following are six critical steps that will help you identify activities in your life that will consistently put you into a state of flow and, therefore, minimize your distractions.

1. Start with Prayer

If you haven't already identified your flows, the first step is to dedicate time specifically to pray for and align yourself with God's guidance. Pray along with the psalmist, "In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly (Psalm 5:3)." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and anti-Nazi dissident, writes "O God, early in the morning I cry to you. Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you; I cannot do this alone."^[48]

Be sure you put the phone away, remove yourself from all distractions, and ask God to reveal or reconnect with you your passions. You will want to allow yourself time for reflection as part of your prayer. To help with

this, you may want to even consider developing a mission statement or creed similar to the one in the opening of this chapter. Remember, you are seeking meaningful tasks in your life that will take the place of spending time tasks that don't lead to the abundant life.

2. Write out Your Goals

Long before our modern distractions, Arthur Bennett, in his classic book *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day* written in 1910, gives us a poignant reminder of how important a time of reflection can be to the abundant life:

The exercise of concentrating the mind (to which at least half an hour a day should be given) is a mere preliminary, like scales on the piano. All the sensible people of all ages are agreed upon it. And it is not literature, nor is it any other art, nor is it history, nor is it any science. It is the study of one's self. Man, know thyself. I am entirely convinced that what is more than anything else lacking in the life of the average well-intentioned man of today is the reflective mood. We do not reflect. I mean that we do not reflect upon genuinely important things; upon the problem of our happiness, upon the main direction in which we are going, upon what life is giving to us, upon the share which reason has (or has not) in determining our actions, and upon the relation between our principles and our conduct. And yet you are in search of happiness, are you not? Have you discovered it? All I urge is that a life in which conduct does not fairly well accord with principles is a silly life; and that conduct can only be made to accord with principles by means of daily examination, reflection, and resolution.^[49]

In researching this book, I had a great interview with Jay Kim, author of *Analog Christian* and other books. As a pastor in Silicon Valley, he has

thought and written extensively on how we can live out meaningful lives in the digital world. He even knew how to pronounce Csikszentmihalyi! While he offered multiple valuable insights, I especially appreciated his comments below on the importance of taking the time to individually reflect on the abundant life as Bennett described above, but from a Christian worldview:

It's interesting when you think about how Csikszentmihalyi described the flow state. It's functionally in opposition to how we operate when we're scrolling. He talks about complete focus, almost like tunnel vision, where you are so engaged that you lose track of time and nothing else distracts you. In some ways, when we're scrolling, we also lose track of time, but it's because of distraction—we're just moving from one thing to the next. It's the opposite of focus. Online life does not require or demand anything of us; there's no skill required whatsoever. We've been led into this completely distracted state of being where it's hard to even answer what truly matters, because it's not an intellectual reality—you have to experience it to understand it. And that requires a focused flow.

To that end, I want to encourage you to set aside the time you need to remove distractions and make finding what truly matters for you an intellectual reality. Following are questions to consider as you endeavor this important task of brainstorming your existing flow activities or developing new ones:

- ❖ What activities have you done in the past where you lost track of time because you were so engaged?
- ❖ What skills or tasks do you enjoy that challenge you just enough—not too easy, but not overwhelming?

- ◇ When was the last time you felt completely absorbed in what you were doing? What were you doing?
- ◇ Do you have any hobbies or interests that require intense focus and attention?
- ◇ What type of tasks or projects make you feel a sense of accomplishment or satisfaction when completed?
- ◇ What activities allow you to use your strengths in a way that feels natural and rewarding?
- ◇ What are some tasks or activities that you look forward to and feel excited about starting?
- ◇ Which environments or settings make it easier for you to concentrate and stay focused?
- ◇ What activities do you find yourself naturally drawn to when you have free time?
- ◇ Have you ever experienced a sense of calm or clarity while doing a specific task? What was it, and how did it make you feel?
- ◇ Which activities make you feel more energized or refreshed even after you've spent a lot of time on them?
- ◇ Are there any repetitive tasks or routines that help you get into a rhythm or a focused state?
- ◇ What creative outlets allow you to express yourself fully and make you lose track of time?

- ◇ When working on something, do you prefer solitary focus or collaborative engagement. In which activities do you experience either of these?
- ◇ How can you incorporate more of the activities that make you feel “in the zone” into your daily or weekly routine?

Using the above questions, take the time to write out the specific goals you plan to achieve. Each of these goals should be stated clearly and, ideally, include the five parts of a SMART goal: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. In addition to clear objectives, it is critical that your goals have the elements needed to put you into a flow state: an appropriate challenge/skill balance and a feedback loop.

In addition to a clearly stated objective, flow states require a task that has an appropriate challenge/skill balance. Csikszentmihalyi called this the “flow channel.”^[50] It’s commonly depicted in the way I’ve done in figure 1 below.

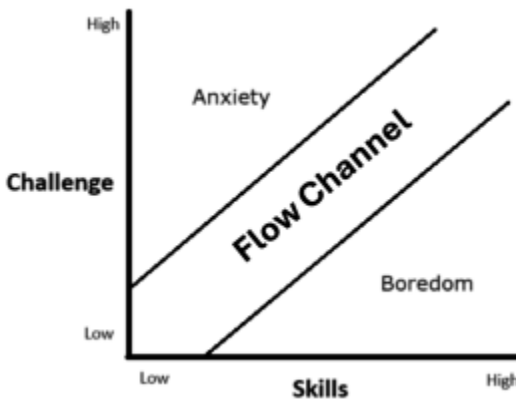


Figure 1: flow channel

If the challenge for the task is too difficult, we slip into anxiety and ultimately failure. Conversely, if the task is too easy, we wallow in boredom. Between those two parameters, the task must require the optimal level of skills for you to complete the task. For example, if you are highly skilled but a particular challenge is low, you'll get bored. The idea is to develop goals that are just beyond your current abilities yet achievable. Steven Kotler, in *The Rise of Superman: Decoding Science of Ultimate Human Performance*, found the optimal level of difficulty for a flow state. He suggests that the ideal challenge level is around 4 percent beyond the person's current abilities—enough to push the individual out of their comfort zone but not so much that it becomes overwhelming and induces anxiety.^[51]

For example, imagine that you have just started to develop a running routine. Your current regimen averages three-to-five miles, five times per week. Then you decide to sign up for a marathon in one month. You commit to increasing your miles drastically over the next few weeks to train. The result is the task and deadline you selected will be too challenging unless you are naturally gifted in running. You will likely endure frustration and injuries due to the goal you selected, and it won't put you into a flow state. Conversely, if you decide to train for a one-mile fun run that takes place six months from now, the task will be too easy and you will likely become bored and, again, fail to get into the flow channel.

McGonigal, in *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, discusses how gamification can be used to make tasks more engaging and how it can increase motivation by modifying the challenge level of tasks.^[52] If the task you are completing is typically easy, consider using gamification to increase the challenge—for example, in the way I added a leaderboard and digital badges to online class discussions. Online discussions are, for many students, tedious and boring. By adding a leaderboard to the online discussion, the students

worked both in teams and alone to increase their positions by creating additional posts and replies. Almost any tedious task can, with some thought, be gamified into a challenge that is appropriate. Fitness apps are another great example. I have personally benefited from creating challenges with friends that allow us to view each other's fitness over a specific time period.

Conversely, if the task you have selected seems too hard, you will want to consider breaking the task down into smaller but achievable milestones. For example, while training for a marathon in one month may not be the best goal for a beginner, it could be your goal if you register for a marathon a year from now and plan to first complete a 5K and then a half marathon.

3. Identify a Baseline for Your Current Distraction Level

Flow requires a feedback mechanism to allow you to know how you are performing. Since our smartphones provide a significant portion of the distractions in our routines, take the time to identify your current distraction level with your phone. Following are several questions and validated surveys to consider:

- ◇ Before you begin measuring your distraction level, without looking at your device, guess the answers to the following: How many times a day do I pick up my phone? How much time do I think I spend on my phone per day?
- ◇ Download a time-tracking app that will monitor how often and how long you are on your phone (time-tracking options might include Moment, Rescue Time, or ScreenTime).
- ◇ Over the course of five days, track how many times per day were you are on your phone and how much time you spend on your phone.

◇ Take the Smartphone Addiction Scale survey (<https://www.healthyscreens.com/scale>) to provide an assessment of your current smartphone usage.^[53] The Smartphone Addiction Scale (SAS) is a widely used tool designed to assess the risk of smartphone addiction. It has been validated through several studies, showing good reliability and construct validity. The scale typically measures various dimensions such as daily-life disturbance, positive anticipation, withdrawal, and tolerance, which are characteristic of behavioral addictions.

◇ Compare your data from the tracking app and surveys to your original guesses. How close were you? What if anything surprises you?

4. Develop and Follow a Pre-Flow Routine

We have all developed routines into our lives as a means to give our lives structure to support ourselves, the people around us, and the things in our lives we care about. We brush our teeth to support our long-term dental health. We perform certain tasks each day to help us wind down at night and prepare for the next day. The same is true for developing a flow routine. You need to develop a routine to ensure you incorporate it into your lifestyle and effectively mitigate distractions.

Following are several steps to help you develop a pre-flow routine:

◇ **Identify focus agents.** Write down activities that have helped you to focus in the past. For example, before dedicating time to writing at a coffee shop, I will sometimes go for a walk to pray and prepare my mind for the writing. Other times I will simply focus my thoughts on the task ahead with a silent car drive to the coffee shop. Other possibilities you

might consider are listening to a specific type of music, praying in a particular way, reading inspirational material, or listening to a relevant podcast.

❖ **Eliminate external triggers.** Write down external triggers that help you to focus. I have personally benefited from working by myself in nature or working in a busy environment such as a coffee shop with background noise. I have also benefited from background instrumental worship or upbeat instrumental music. Others benefit from white noise such as that of a fan or a fountain. Others benefit from as much silence as possible.

❖ **Create a routine.** Using your notes from the first two steps, write down a specific routine you will use to help you prepare for your flow sessions. I encourage you to experiment with several examples, and if one method starts to fail, be willing to experiment with another method for a while.

❖ **Create a distraction free environment.** Flow requires an environment in which we will not be distracted. By definition, flow requires that we give the task our complete attention. Therefore, we need to take the time to ensure external distractions are minimized. Small changes can yield big results in terms of triggering a flow state. I have personally benefited from using the do-not-disturb function on my phone, wearing headphones with instrumental music, closing my office door, and letting family know in advance of the need to focus for a specified time period.

5: Create a Feedback Loop

The fifth area to consider is the feedback loop. When you enter into a flow state, you have a clear goal that has an appropriate challenge/skill balance, and you receive regular feedback. Gamers, while in a flow state,

have a clear goal for the game and a constant feedback mechanism in terms of points related to other players and/or levels attained.

For example, the feedback loop in a goal to run a marathon in one year is your weekly goals. Generally, the rule for running is to avoid training more than 10 percent beyond your current activity level. Thus, a well-defined feedback mechanism is a plan that gradually increases your miles by 10 percent over the course of the year. As you attain each weekly and monthly milestone, your confidence grows about your ability to attain your goal.

6. Commit to Monotasking

Flow requires a commitment to completing one task at a time. The planning you completed in the previous steps to developing a pre-flow routine and removing external distractions will set the stage for you to focus on your goal. Our culture seems to put great value in multitasking, but the reality and growing research is that simultaneously completing multiple tasks requiring a degree of attention is less productive and effective than monotasking.^[54]

The reality is that it takes time for most people to build their comfort and train their brain to monotask. In order to build your endurance in this, start small and work up to longer periods. First, define and develop blocking time in your day. Practice a single task for a short block of time and then allow yourself a short break. For example, start with setting a timer to focus on a particular task for ten minutes, then allow yourself a two-minute break. Over time, you will develop the ability to lengthen your monotasking timeframe—from ten to twenty minutes, to one hour, and even two hours. A similar and popular technique is the Pomodoro method, in which you work in twenty-five-minute intervals with five minute breaks.

Csikszentmihalyi has said that individuals in flow can sustain attention for several hours if the challenge and skill level are appropriate.^[55] I have personally found that, during writing or research, I can commit to monotasking and easily enter a flow state in which I am completely focused on the task. However, the internal commitment to focus exclusively on the task requires intense mental resources, and I generally need a break after a maximum of four hours.

In the end, it is up to you to decide what timeframe feels realistic for you to devote your complete attention. Start small and be kind to yourself as you build your tolerance for monotasking.

Key Points

- ❖ The abundant life is achieved by focusing on what truly matters, not by managing distractions.
- ❖ Flow states, where one is fully engaged, are essential to experiencing true joy and fulfillment.
- ❖ Focus on what truly matters in your life rather than simply managing distractions.
- ❖ Pursue activities that bring you into a flow state, where you are fully engaged and experience true joy.
- ❖ Identify and dedicate time to meaningful tasks that align with your God-given purpose.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Matthew 13:44–46. What treasures in your life are being overlooked because of digital distractions? How can you “sell everything” to pursue what truly matters?
2. How does focusing on meaningful activities help you experience the abundant life Jesus offers? Share an example from your own life.
3. What are the passions or activities that demand your full attention? How can you incorporate more of these into your daily routine?

How to Grab The Full Version FREE!

Enjoying The Focused Faith?

**Let me know! Email me for an immediate reply with the
FREE download of the FULL book!**

Email: Brian@thefocusedfaith.com

With the email subject = FREEBOOK

Notes

Chapter 1

- [1] Michael H. Goldhaber, “The Attention Economy and the Net,” *First Monday*, April 7, 1997, <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v2i4.519>.
- [2] Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads* (New York: Knopf, 2016).
- [3] “Alphabet Revenue 2001-2024,” Stock Analysis, accessed July 9, 2024, <https://stockanalysis.com/stocks/goog/revenue/>.
- [4] Tim Hinchliffe, “Big Tech’s Addictive Business Model Makes Us ‘Attention Vampires,’ Distracts From Urgent Threats Like China: ‘Social Dilemma’ Star Testifies,” *The Sociable* (blog), April 27, 2021, <https://sociable.co/big-tech/big-tech-addictive-business-model-makes-attention-vampires-distracts-urgent-threats-china-social-dilemma-star-testifies/>.
- [5] Movie & TV reviews for parents, “Constant Companion: A Week in the Life of a Young Person’s Smartphone Use | Common Sense Media,” accessed August 6, 2024, <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/constant-companion-a-week-in-the-life-of-a-young-persons-smartphone-use>.
- [6] Monica Anderson and Jingjing Jiang, “Teens, Social Media and Technology 2018,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), May 31, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>.
- [7] Gloria Mark, *Multitasking in the Digital Age* (Springer Nature, 2022).

[8] “A Day Without Media,” A Day Without Media, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://withoutmedia.wordpress.com/>.

[9] “Study Finds Lure of Entertainment, Work Hard for People to Resist | University of Chicago News,” January 27, 2012, <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/study-finds-lure-entertainment-work-hard-people-resist>.

[10] Alex Kerai, “Cell Phone Usage Statistics: Mornings Are for Notifications,” Reviews.org, July 21, 2023, <https://www.reviews.org/mobile/cell-phone-addiction/>.

[11] thibaut meurisse, *Dopamine Detox: A Short Guide to Remove Distractions and Get Your Brain to Do Hard Things*, ed. Kerry J. Donovan (July 3, 2021), 2021).

[12] Susan Greenfield, *Mind Change: How Digital Technologies Are Leaving Their Mark on Our Brains* (Random House, 2015).

[13] Mark, *Multitasking in the Digital Age*.

[14] Mark.

[15] “Industry Ethicist: Social Media Companies Amplifying Americans’ Anger for Profit - CBS News,” November 6, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tristan-harris-social-media-political-polarization-60-minutes-2022-11-06/>.

[16] Relay FM, “Presentable #19: Design Ethics and the Race to the Bottom of the Brain Stem,” Relay FM, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.relay.fm/presentable/19>.

[17] “AlgoTransparency,” AlgoTransparency, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://algotransparency.org/>.

- [18] Cornelia Sindermann et al., “Age, Gender, Personality, Ideological Attitudes and Individual Differences in a Person’s News Spectrum: How Many and Who Might Be Prone to ‘Filter Bubbles’ and ‘Echo Chambers’ Online?,” *Heliyon* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e03214>.
- [19] BJ Fogg, “A Behavior Model for Persuasive Design,” in *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Persuasive Technology*, Persuasive ’09 (New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery, 2009), 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1145/1541948.1541999>.
- [20] Bianca Bosker, “What Will Break People’s Addictions to Their Phones?,” *The Atlantic*, October 8, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/11/the-binge-breaker/501122/>.
- [21] Dar Meshi, Carmen Morawetz, and Hauke R Heekeren, “Nucleus Accumbens Response to Gains in Reputation for the Self Relative to Gains for Others Predicts Social Media Use,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7 (2013): 57063.
- [22] Lauren E Sherman et al., “What the Brain ‘Likes’: Neural Correlates of Providing Feedback on Social Media,” *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 13, no. 7 (2018): 699–707.
- [23] Jean M Twenge and W Keith Campbell, “Associations between Screen Time and Lower Psychological Well-Being among Children and Adolescents: Evidence from a Population-Based Study,” *Preventive Medicine Reports* 12 (2018): 271–83.
- [24] Melissa G Hunt et al., “No More FOMO: Limiting Social Media Decreases Loneliness and Depression,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 37, no. 10 (2018): 751–68.

[25] Johann Hari, *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention—and How to Think Deeply Again* (Crown, 2023).

[26] Fogg, “A Behavior Model for Persuasive Design.”

[27] “How Facebook’s Like Button Powered Today’s Internet,” Yahoo News, February 4, 2024, <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/facebook-like-button-powered-internet-000652802.html>.

[28] Megha Sharma, “The TikTok Algorithm Explained + Tips to Go Viral,” SocialPilot, April 23, 2024, <https://www.socialpilot.co/blog/tiktok-algorithm>.

[29] “Sean Parker Slams Facebook for ‘Exploiting a Vulnerability in Human Psychology’ - TheWrap,” accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.thewrap.com/sean-parker-facebook-exploiting-vulnerability-human-psychology/>.

Steve Kovach, “Former Facebook Exec Feels ‘tremendous Guilt’ for What He Helped Make,” Business Insider, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.businessinsider.com/former-facebook-exec-chamath-palihapitiya-social-media-damaging-society-2017-12>.

[30] Doug, “Why Tech Leaders Don’t Let Their Kids Use Tech,” Kidzu, November 13, 2017, <https://kidzu.co/health-wellbeing/why-tech-leaders-dont-let-their-kids-use-tech/>.

[31] Kovach, “Former Facebook Exec Feels ‘tremendous Guilt’ for What He Helped Make.”

[32] “Bill Gates & Steve Jobs Limited Screen Time for Their Kids,” CRM.org, March 15, 2018, <https://crm.org/articles/bill-gates-kids-and-steve-jobs-limited-screen-time>.

- [33] Doug, “Why Tech Leaders Don’t Let Their Kids Use Tech.”
- [34] PodBean Development, “Self-Control | Timothy Keller Sermons Podcast by Gospel in Life,” accessed August 5, 2024, <http://podcast.gospelinlife.com/e/self-control/>.
- [35] Jay Y. Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age* (InterVarsity Press, 2020).
- [36] Michaelleen Doucleff, “The Truth about Teens, Social Media and the Mental Health Crisis,” Houston Public Media, April 25, 2023, <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/npr/2023/04/25/1171773181/the-truth-about-teens-social-media-and-the-mental-health-crisis/>.
- [37] Kim, *Analog Church*.

Chapter 2

- [38] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2022).
- [39] Fisher.
- [40] Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (WW Norton & Company, 2020).
- [41] Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (Penguin, 2019).
- [42] Mahatma Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Courier Corporation, 1983).

- [43] Sebastian Deterding et al., “From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness: Defining ‘Gamification,’” in *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments*, MindTrek ’11 (Tampere, Finland: Association for Computing Machinery, 2011), 9–15, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2181037.2181040>.
- [44] Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.
- [45] Zoltan Buzady, “Flow, Leadership and Serious Games - a Pedagogical Perspective,” *World Journal of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development* 14, no. 2/3 (2017): 204–17, <https://doi.org/10.1108/WJSTSD-05-2016-0035>.
- [46] Kim, *Analog Church*.
- [47] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Scm Press, 2013).
- [48] Bonhoeffer.
- [49] Arnold Bennett, *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day: With The Human Machine* (Courier Corporation, 2007).
- [50] Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, “Psychology Today: Finding Flow,” 2007.
- [51] Steven Kotler, *The Rise of Superman: Decoding the Science of Ultimate Human Performance* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014).
- [52] Jane McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (Penguin, 2011).

- [53] Min Kwon et al., “The Smartphone Addiction Scale: Development and Validation of a Short Version for Adolescents,” *PLOS ONE* 8, no. 12 (December 31, 2013): e83558, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0083558>.
- [54] Eyal Ophir, Clifford Nass, and Anthony D Wagner, “Cognitive Control in Media Multitaskers,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 106, no. 37 (2009): 15583–87.
- [55] Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990.

