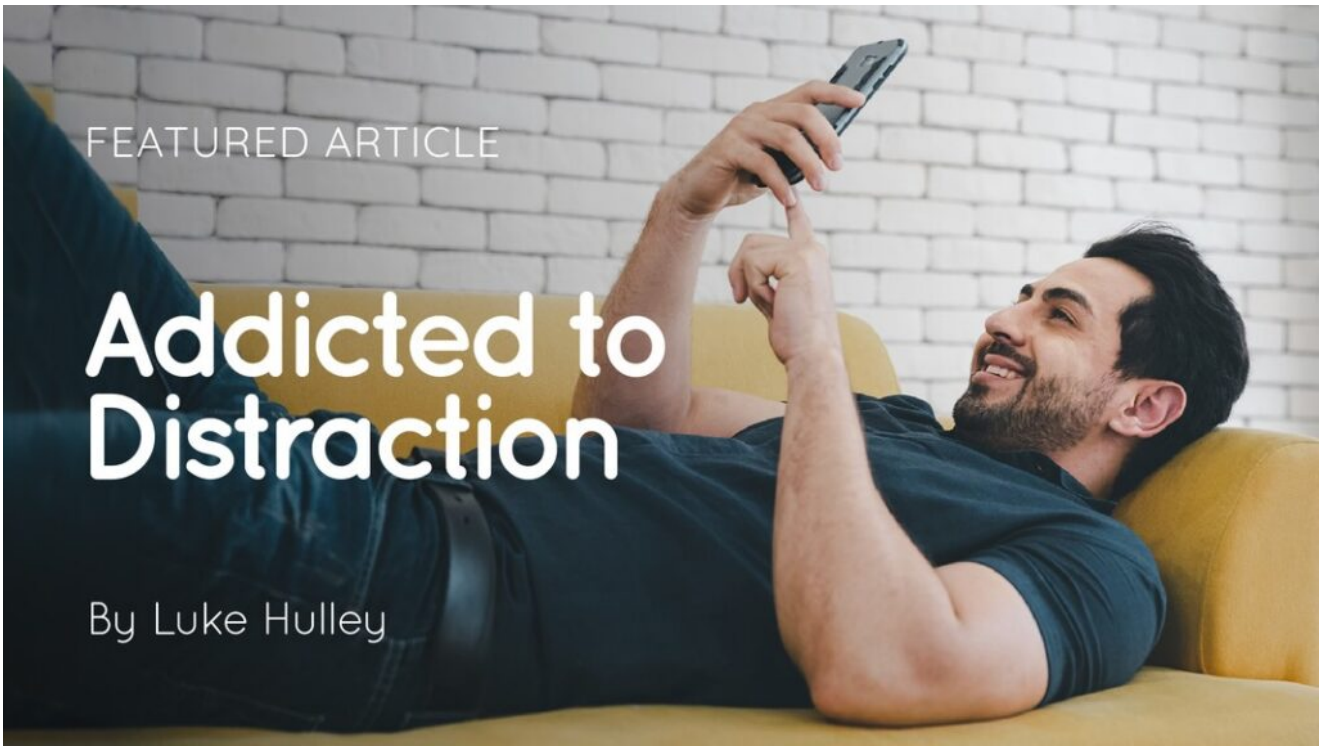
Addicted to Distraction

Luke Hulley 7 October 2025



In his letter, John, ever the “Apostle of love”, says right at the outset, ‘We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And this fellowship of ours is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.’ (1 John 1:3) The kind of intimacy which the Father has invited us into is the kind in which the Holy Spirit searches out the ‘deep things of God’, even ‘the thoughts of God’ and reveals them to our spirits. It is a kind of wordless communion which can only be spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2).

Our communion with the Father makes satan incredibly jealous, and he has devised many strategies over the millennia to disrupt it. Jesus warned us about this and said, ‘…the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.’ (Mark 4:19) I believe this is satan’s most effective strategy against us: distraction.

A Host of Distractions

The sophisticated technologies we have at our fingertips in the modern era are wonderful tools when we use them effectively, but they also open us up to a world of almost infinite opportunities for distraction. I was quite startled about a year back when I attended a lecture by an IT expert, Brad Huddleston, and he began to go into detail about the effect of modern

devices, such as cell phones, on our thought-life and brain function. Many of us have actually developed a chemical addiction to our devices and the host of social media platforms that are on them.

An addiction forms because, when you get a notification on your device, your brain releases a chemical called dopamine, which is what makes you feel pleasure. Over time, your brain begins to need more dopamine than it can naturally produce, and so it gets addicted to the technologies that give it a 'high'.

Cell Phone Addiction

Some of the tell-tale signs of cell phone addiction are the following:

- Phone separation anxiety (How do you feel when separated from your phone? Anxious, irritable, uneasy, moody, angry?)
- Checking phone while driving
- Checking phone while in conversation
- Allowing your phone to constantly interrupt what you are focused on doing

One of the signs of severe addiction is when your habit causes you to endanger your life or the lives of others. Sound familiar? Do you ever text while driving?

When you check your phone, it can often be your brain's way of escaping boredom by getting a 'hit' of dopamine. This nasty addiction begins to shape us into very dysfunctional Christians who check our phones while we are with friends and family, are on our phones while the Word of God is being shared, and we may even sneak a peek during our devotional times with God! What a terrible thing to be sending the message that 'I love my phone more than You!'

Facebook and Internet Addiction
The "newness factor" of images or interesting information that we get while scrolling online is actually addictive.

If the thought of being without Facebook or having no internet connection makes you feel anxious, irritable, restless or angry, you are addicted.

This addiction might seem pretty harmless, but it can have a devastating effect on our Christian walk. The internet is often an escape from your reality, which may be boring at times. It is an escape into a 'hyper reality' – a fake world providing a false sense of community. Ironically, it can leave you feeling isolated and lonely, even depressed.

Too much time entertaining yourself online can cause you to feel demotivated, incredibly

distracted and ultimately desensitised to the voice of the Spirit. By ‘filling in the gaps’ of our day in those precious moments when we could have been having communion with God, we can begin to feel distant from Him.

TV Series and Video Game Addiction

If you feel bad about the amount of time you watch TV or spend gaming, but you can’t seem to change your pattern, you are probably addicted. These forms of entertainment are supposed to provide enjoyment and a way to unwind, but they so quickly develop into much more. We can become engrossed in imaginary worlds because our own lives lack excitement or have perhaps become too stressful to face. But there is a spiritual principle that we ‘become what we behold’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). If we are filling our minds with the world, we inevitably become worldly ourselves.

Multi-tasking

Scientifically speaking, we can’t actually multitask; we switch between tasks. For example, I’m busy writing a report, then read a message on my phone, take a call, check my email, have a conversation with someone, and then I get back to writing my report.

The trouble is, every ‘interruption’ releases dopamine into our brain and (as strange as this may sound), we get addicted to distractions. We develop a shorter concentration span because we now need distraction. A consequence of this addiction is that our brains develop a barrier to the constant flood of dopamine. The result is that the ‘simple pleasures’ in life that we used to enjoy lose their appeal, causing a kind of emotional numbness.

The Result

What happens to the ‘simple pleasures’ of the Christian life, like reading my Bible, prayer or worship? When I read my Bible, there are no hyperlinks to follow, no interesting-looking images or sounds to distract me, so I get disinterested and disengage. When I pray, I struggle to concentrate because I’ve trained my mind to keep shifting its attention. When I chat with friends and family, I struggle to give them my full attention. We feel anxious, frustrated, and tired all the time because of how we live.

We are a distracted generation, constantly on the hunt for more entertainment to fill the silences in our lives, and it robs us of peace, true joy and, worst of all, intimacy with Jesus.

How to Break Free

The lecture I attended sparked some serious introspection of my own life, and I have had to

learn how to use technology differently. Here are some adjustments that I have made that have really made a difference, and a few other suggestions that might help:

- My cell phone goes off in the evening until after I've had my time with Jesus in the morning.
- My phone is off when I am resting.
- My phone is off when I'm in conversation.
- I receive minimal notifications on my phone from social media.
- I only use Facebook once a day.
- We have set times in the week for TV viewing.
- For my most often referenced reading material, I read hard copies.

Other strategies:

- Focus on one thing! Avoid switching between tasks.
- Digital detox: some of us will need to go without certain devices (or social media) for a time.
- Replace digital with analogue activities.
- Practice natural detox activities, such as exercise, sleep, and reading hard copy materials.
- Give yourself a break from technology every hour.
- Reading extends your concentration span.

Is distraction robbing you of true fellowship? Are you addicted to distraction? If so, God's desire for you is that you de-clutter your life and make space for Him again. Fellowship with God requires a sensitive heart and a mind free from distractions. As God's 'called out ones', let us resist the culture of hedonism that brings emptiness and rather make Jesus our greatest pursuit in life.

Reference: Huddleston, Brad (2016) Digital Cocaine. Christian Art Publishers