

Indistractable

Overcoming the World's Distractions

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Are you listening?

There's a good chance that I've already exceeded your attention span. It's often labeled 'social acceleration,' as the accessibility and volume of information literally floods our minds. Social media, weather, news feeds, on-line games, books, and TV shows are all struggling to compete in the increasingly competitive war for our attention.

Over 61% of the estimated 7.8 billion people in the world now use the internet, with over half of the usage being conducted via a mobile device. Over 3.5 billion social media users are spending an average of 3 hours per day on social networks and messaging. It's estimated that every person will generate 1.7 megabytes of data each second, creating 2.5 quintillion bytes of data each day.

One...two...In just that time, an estimated 80,000 Google searches were just completed.

More data was generated in the last two years than in the entire human history (at least post-flood). Based on IDC's study, "The Digital Universe in 2020," we now have around 40 zettabytes of data. A zettabyte is a 1 followed by 21 zeros. Ninety percent of all data has been generated within the last two years. We are rapidly approaching the yottabyte, the brontobyte, and the gegobyte, which is 10^{30} .

A recent study by the Technical University of Denmark scientifically connected social acceleration with the decrease in collective attention. The study proved that, as more content is produced at a faster pace, it is exhausting our collective attention span at an accelerated rate. The abundance and speed of available information is creating a shortened peak of interest—we need more, and more, and more.

The question before us today is, what is the opportunity cost of all this activity and information? Opportunity cost is defined as the loss of potential gains from one choice made over alternatives. Said another way, if we invest our time and resources doing something, there is an opportunity cost for everything else that we did not do with those same resources. If we know we should do something, and yet we don't do it, the opportunity cost of that selfish choice is indeed sin.

With the constant and ever-increasing speed of information flow, we're engaged in a daily combat over literally every second of our attention. The tools and technology designed to connect us are decreasing attention spans, manipulating our behavior, and increasing anxiety, depression and mental illness.

I can hear it now: "OK, Boomer..." Well, Zoomer, listen up: On the surface, these advancements seem great, and WOW, man, they're free! But are we really that gullible? The cost of these 'advancements' is huge. At risk is our most precious and valuable asset. Our time and attention are a type of currency, and the opportunity cost of that currency is the achievement of our goals. These days, many spend more time documenting their life than enjoying it, striving for that ego inflation

and dopamine hit from a ‘look at me’ post. Many spend more time in a virtual world at the expense of the real world. And many spend more time as spectators in other’s lives, even following people they will never meet.

How significant is the opportunity cost of our distracted time and attention? How much of our time could be better spent on building up our relationship with God and His family? Are we allowing ourselves to become addicted to news feeds, current events, and politics? Do we perhaps justify our obsession, stating we are “keeping watch,” per Luke 21:36? That's not what Christ was referring to, brethren. He was referring to spiritual preparation, not world events. We’re told repeatedly to focus and to “think on these things”!

In the book, *Indistractable: How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life*, the author, Nir Eya states,

In the future, there will be two kinds of people in the world:

1. those who let their attention and lives be controlled and coerced by others
2. and those who proudly call themselves “indistractable.”

He goes on:

We all understand that if we want to be more productive at anything, we need to stop wasting time, so we already know what to do. What we don’t know is how to stop getting distracted.

He continues that time management is really pain management. We have to train ourselves to overcome procrastination that leads us to avoid that activity because we perceive it to be painful or less fun. We have both internal and external triggers that drive our actions. Each action we take is either aligned with our broader intention (alignment is traction towards goals) or misaligned (a distraction—look, squirrel!). Traction helps us accomplish goals; distraction leads us away from them. The key to becoming indistractable is to remove unhelpful external triggers. All those alerts and messages on our cell phones create external triggers of distraction. We check out a new post and next thing you know we’ve wasted an hour. We must take action to remove distraction of external triggers. And then we must tackle our internal triggers of distraction.

For years psychologists have pushed the concept of ego depletion, stating we all have a limited amount of willpower. Turns out just believing this false concept becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If we tell ourselves we have limited self-control, we will have limited self-control. If we say it’s OK that we just vegged out instead of working out, and it’s OK that we just ate that pint of ice cream because we had a hard day and we’re tired and we can’t expect ourselves to do anything else—just believing that we have limited self-control and willpower makes us much less likely to accomplish our goals. We know Paul reminds us in II Timothy that God has given us His spirit of power, and of love, and self-control.

Nir states that we can’t call something a distraction unless we know what it is distracting us from. We must learn to value and control our most precious currency—our time and attention. This requires a daily schedule and commitment to hold ourselves accountable to our plan. He adds that we need to regularly reflect and refine our schedule. We do this through two questions:

1. (Reflect) “When in my schedule did I do what I said I would do and when did I allow myself to get distracted?”
2. (Refine): “Are there changes I can make to my daily schedule that will give me the time I need to better live out my values?”

In addition to schedules, he states, pacts or pre-commitments are very effective in controlling ourselves. An example of a pre-commitment is: I will not bring mint chocolate chip ice cream into this house for the obvious reasons—it’s like kryptonite!

The author needed a bit more pre-commitment to exercise, so he developed a mantra he called, ‘burn or burn’. He taped a \$100 bill to tomorrow's date on a calendar, and he had a cigarette lighter just underneath on a counter. Each day he had to make the choice: Either he burned calories and worked out and moved the \$100 bill to the next day, or he had to burn the \$100 bill. He never missed a workout since. We can make a pact that we will never waste more than 1 hour a day on the Internet, and if need be, use a pre-commitment app that will block access for a period of time.

We’ve probably all seen the black and white photo of a bus load of people, all reading newspapers and books. Distractions are not new, of course. But we must be more aware, brethren, for the distractions before us today are more powerful, prevalent and addictive. They are programming our behavior through these "free" tools.

Technology is not evil, so don't get me wrong. And spending a controlled amount of time on entertainment is indeed OK. But if we allow all the distractions to take us away from the traction of our Savior Jesus Christ, that is a big problem. Our time with Him and God the Father can never take second place.

As we’re told in Luke 14, we all must count the cost of our high calling. Overcoming distraction requires a daily evaluation of our time, attention, achievements and most importantly, a daily evaluation of our Christian opportunity cost of how we used our God-given resources and time that day. We must, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 5, “Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

In this world of distraction, we must learn to become indistractable—holding onto the faith once delivered.