

STAY AWAKE DIGITAL DISCIPLINES

DIGITAL
DISCIPLINES

WEEKEND!

J. DANA TRENT

19

tech support



KEEPING THE FAITH IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Each January many of us set New Year's resolutions. From eating healthier to working out, resolutions tend to be new habits we'd like to form or goals we'd like to meet in the next 12 months. But our behavior can be difficult to modify, and we often struggle to add something new to our already busy school and work schedules.

I tend to make my resolutions spiritual practices—prayer, scripture-reading, journaling, and meditation—tools that deepen my faith while enriching my life. For the past several years, I've tried using technology to help me keep my spiritual resolutions.

Downloading the latest meditation or prayer app, I've hoped it would motivate me to stick with the daily habit beyond the bump of energy I feel at the start of a fresh calendar year. Typically, by day ten, I've been frustrated, viewing the notification as just another to-do, rather than a prompt to help me focus my efforts.

Now I realize I have been viewing digital disciplines the wrong way.

I expected this new shiny technology to provide an easy "fix" for my lack of spiritual discipline. I imagined the apps to be my cure-all, and I was disappointed when they felt like a flimsy Band-Aid®. My digital disciplines weren't working because I was relying on the tech to do the work, instead of engaging with the practice itself.

24 JANUARY>FEBRUARY 2019

january 14–20

STAY AWAKE DIGITAL DISCIPLINES

DIGITAL
DISCIPLINES

WEEKEND!

The practice of disciplines—prayer, meditation, or *lectio divina*—requires me to dedicate time to be still, to reflect on scripture, and to be attentive to God. If I'm not intentional, I'm only tapping, swiping, and checking off a box to say I did it—rather than honoring the reasons I chose to expand my spiritual practice in the first place.

I need to reframe the role that tech plays in my spiritual disciplines.

Tech is not a substitute for practice. The app won't pray, meditate, or read scripture for me—but digital tools can provide accessibility, structure, accountability, and community.

Apps and online communities can offer support for our spiritual disciplines. For instance, these tools can give me a starting point, a scaffold for my practice, and a channel by which to interact with other participants. Technology allows me not only to remain accountable to my spiritual discipline resolutions, but also to connect, interact, and learn from others' journeys.

The digital tools, then, become an added support system for the spiritual discipline—not a substitute for the discipline itself.

Websites, social media feeds, and apps such as Calm, Centering Prayer, My Quiet Spaces, **devozine**, and *The Upper Room* daily devotional guide offer a built-in network of daily check-ins, prayer and meditation prompts, scripture passages, faith stories, quotes, tips, timers, and inspirational photos for our path. They also demonstrate the real struggles and joys of keeping the faith in a digital world. If we are intentional with our tech, we can encounter and hold sacred space at the touch of a button.

Though digital tools by themselves cannot deepen my faith, enrich my life, or keep my New Year's spiritual resolutions, these tools offer an avenue through which I can build my practice, receive support and connection, and offer others the same. <

Rev. J. Dana Trent is a graduate of Duke Divinity School and a religion and humanities faculty member at Wake Technical Community College. Her latest book, *One Breath at a Time: A Skeptic's Guide to Christian Meditation*, is now available from Upper Room Books.

20

NEXT DAY STRETCH

How might you reframe the way you use apps and other digital tools to engage your spirituality online? This New Year, consider what spiritual resolutions you can begin and how the appropriate digital tools can help you keep them. Then clear the clutter that doesn't invite you to dig deeper.



www.devozine.org

JANUARY>FEBRUARY 2019 25

STAY AWAKE DIGITAL DISCIPLINES

PRIVACY SETTINGS

WEEKEND!

blessing or curse?

REMEMBER WHAT'S IMPORTANT

With today's technology, I can stay in touch with family, talk to people around the planet, and take pictures whenever I like. This is both a blessing and a curse. I can capture beautiful sunsets or funny moments and share them with others. I can also spend so much time waiting for the perfect moment to capture that I miss out on life happening around me. It's nice to get lots of likes on Instagram; but what is more important, the photo or the memory? I would rather have my mind filled with good stories and laughs than my phone filled with pictures I took while missing out on something important.

Sierra Klotz, 22 [Hamburg, New Jersey]

GIVE IT A REST

I was having nightmares and trouble sleeping, so I went to the doctor. His diagnosis: I had been spending too much time on my phone, online, and in front of the TV. The lights from the screens trigger something in our brains that makes us stay awake longer. If you have trouble falling asleep, try turning off your phone or TV for a while before going to bed; use this time to relax and to wind down from the day. For me, giving up tech to read a book, to read the Bible, or to write in my prayer journal has made the difference.

Christina Martin, 19 [Norfolk, Virginia]

54 SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2017

october 16-22

STAY AWAKE DIGITAL DISCIPLINES

PRIVACY SETTINGS

WEEKEND!

BREAK FROM THE NOISE

During Lent, I decided to give up secular entertainment. Movies, music, even my favorite blogs and YouTube channels were fairly easy to give up. But when I went shopping, I would be bombarded by TV screens and music over which I had no control. The hardest part was ending my fast. Taking a break from the noise had felt good. Yet, as soon as Lent ended, I quickly returned to my old habits; and trying to catch up on all I had missed was overwhelming. For me, the real challenge was how to carry the lessons of my fast into the rest of the year. To build new habits would take discipline—but it would be worth it.

Alice Mayer [Weems, Virginia]

PAUSE BEFORE YOU POST

"I can't find the photo you said Ashley posted of her and Jake."

"Probably adjusted her privacy settings. Here, I took a screen shot . . ."

Many people carefully adjust their online settings to control who sees which details of their lives and to keep other information hidden. Our words often flow easily into cyberspace when we feel hidden behind a screen, but what we post can follow us for the rest of our lives. Our posts can also direct people toward Jesus or draw them away from him. When we are tempted to vent, to criticize, to be crude or hurtful, adjusting the settings within our hearts could have a ripple effect that extends far beyond our devices. I pray our posts on social media will reflect our faith in Christ. <

Misty L. Butler [Bowling Green, Kentucky]

22 NEXT DAY STRETCH

TRY A SOCIAL MEDIA FAST

Giving up social media for two or three months allowed me to see how much I depended on it. I checked my phone constantly; I was bummed when people hadn't responded to me, and I missed out on much more important things. Social media had become a crutch, and letting go of it was hard for a few days; but after that, I was happier without it. Now, instead of staring at my phone, I focus on being present with my family and friends. Instead of relying on the virtual approval of others, I focus on being with God and learning to see myself and others through God's eyes.

Kate Underwood [DeKalb, Illinois]

www.devozine.org

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2017 **55**