



media and the brain



Giving Light to Our World

Years ago, just before the highly-anticipated release of the iPad, a journalist asked Steve Jobs, “So, your kids must love the iPad?” The journalist assumed, of course, that the children of Apple’s founder must enjoy unrivaled screen time with constant access to the latest tech devices.

Well, not exactly. Steve Jobs explained in the interview that his children had never used an iPad! Not once. If the journalist imagined a home littered with devices always in use, he was wrong. In the home of Apple’s CEO, family members ate meals together and talked about meaningful topics.

For the rest of us, though, it seems that entertainment and social media have saturated our lives. We may even praise its benefits and conveniences. But could modern media be the greatest distraction from life’s most meaningful activities?

ADDICTION

The average teen now spends nine hours per day on entertainment and social media.¹ The average parent logs nearly eight hours per day of entertainment.² Even toddlers now use mobile devices. 97% of toddlers receive regular screen

time,³ and most of them have zero parental interaction while using the media.⁴ The average child will spend more time watching television by the age of six than he will spend in conversation with his father over his entire lifetime.⁵

Deuteronomy 6:7 portrays human relationships very differently. Instead of text messages and social media posts, God designed the family for togetherness. He instructed families to talk about His commandments throughout the day. "Talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." Morning and evening, walking and talking, eating and worshipping, God designed families to be *together*.

Fast forward to the 21st century. Researchers were astounded when they examined the brains of enthused iPhone users. Brain scans showed a literal *love relationship* with the iPhone. They didn't just like the phone or enjoy the phone. Interacting with their phones activated the same brain circuitry as interacting with and loving a family member or spouse!

When you begin having a love relationship with a piece of hardware, while spending less time with your loved ones, **Matthew 24:12** is being fulfilled. In the last days "the love of many will grow cold."

DEPRESSION, LONELINESS, ISOLATION

Social media was supposed to produce the most connected generation in history. Ironically, it has given rise to the highest rates of loneliness ever recorded. Heavy social media users are 2.7 times more likely to be depressed than those who use less social media.⁶

You know the culture is struggling when you see these odd symptoms cropping up: A South Korean inventor recently revealed a couch with mechanical arms that can hug you. It's designed to feel like you are being held close by a loved one.⁷ Then there's the cuddling with strangers craze—a real thing.⁸ Lonely? Hire a professional cuddler. Inventors have also now designed social robots for preschoolers⁹ and the elderly.¹⁰ They can now have social experiences ... with a robot? These strange phenomena didn't exist just a few years ago. They reveal a deep social and spiritual deficit that is going unfulfilled by the shallow online social experience. We desperately need to replace the virtual with the real. We need to return to God's design for human relationships (like the family and the church).

Entertainment media saturation has become so extreme that psychiatrists are now diagnosing actual media addictions.¹¹ According to the American

Medical Association, there are 19 million video game addicts in America. Five million gamers even clock in at 40+ hours per week.¹² According to data collected by researcher George Barna, entertainment media addiction is the most serious and widespread addiction in America today. *The majority* of Americans qualify as addicts to their favorite media.¹³ Dr. Nicholas Kardaras is an addiction recovery specialist and author of the book *Glow Kids*.¹⁴ “I’ve worked with hundreds of heroin addicts,” he explains. “It’s easier to treat a heroin addict than a true screen addict.”

The addiction problem could even apply to you. Maybe you’re not even fully aware of it. Feel like you can’t go a day without your favorite entertainment or social media? Take heart. The Bible gives invincible hope to the addict. It promises absolute victory in Christ ([1 Corinthians 15:57](#), [1 Corinthians 10:13](#))!

The founding president of Facebook, Sean Parker, admitted that Facebook was deliberately designed to hook users. Their applications, he explained, are “exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology.” Each like and comment were designed to be “a little dopamine hit” to keep users posting. “God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains,” he said.¹⁵

SIMPLE PLEASURES

Indeed, God does know how modern media affects our brains. As our loving Creator, God designed our brains to experience abundant joy in Him (**John 10:10**). He has the only antidote to our media saturation problem.

The beauty of nature,¹⁶ the joy of family relationships,¹⁷ tasty and nutritious food, serving others,¹⁸ studying His word,¹⁹ physical labor,²⁰ gardening,²¹ worship, Sabbath rest²²—these are God’s ways to an abundant life. And recent research studies show that each one of these actually increases happiness levels! On the other hand, studies consistently show more media consumption produces lower levels of happiness and higher levels of boredom.²³

Unfortunately, though the Bible is “sweeter than honey” (**Psalms 119:103**), God’s word captures little interest these days. Why? After all, the Bible is the most printed, best-selling, most read book in history. Well, **Proverbs 27:7** says that the “satisfied” person “loathes the honeycomb.” We’ve become so satisfied and overstimulated with modern media that the Bible seems uninteresting. Media has distorted our mental taste buds.

However, if you talk to anyone who has done a 30-day media fast, you’ll hear the opposite. It goes

something like this: “When I started my 30 days of abstaining from media, it was hard and even painful. But soon I realized how much time I had for better activities! I started to *enjoy* reading my Bible. I had more time to spend with loved ones, in nature, and on other simple pleasures.”²⁴

The Bible promises that God withholds no good thing from you (**Psalm 84:11**). He satisfies the desire of every living being (**Psalm 145:16**). Does some media addiction occupy too much time and brain space in your life? If you give up those distractions, you may moan and groan at first. But your mourning will be turned to joy (**John 16:20**)!

God invites you to try it: “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (**Psalm 34:8**). If you exchange some of your media time for time in God’s word, you will find new meaning and purpose in a life lived in relationship with Jesus. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (**John 17:3**).

For references, visit: glowonline.org.

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TO OUR WORLD**

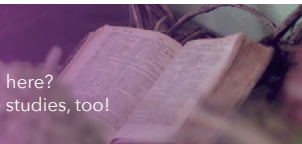


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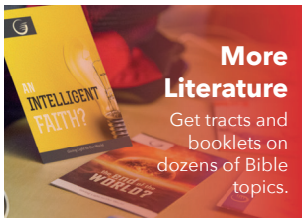
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