

Our Connected Heart

How's Your Time Trending?

by Nicole Whitacre

"One of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove that prayerlessness is not from lack of time." ~John Piper

When was the last time you told a friend, by way of confession: "I'm ashamed to admit it, but I have been too busy to post status updates on Facebook lately." or "I know I really should do better, but I just can't seem to find the time for Pinterest." or "I am so tired that I can't possibly wake up early enough to read the news online or follow what's trending on Twitter."

If you've said anything like this recently, then this new series of posts is not for you. You can stop reading now, because you clearly have better things to do.

But if you, like me, ever experience nagging guilt over missed quiet times or avoided conversations or unfinished housework or schoolwork, and yet still find time to tweet and pin, then lets talk.

I know it's easy to knock Twitter or Pinterest. Low hanging fruit. But it is much harder to steward these technological blessings appropriately. And in many ways, that is what the Internet and social media are--evidences of God's kindness and common grace to mankind.

Through Facebook I can re-connect with au-pair friends from Europe and keep up on the latest progress in my friend's adoption. I can pin recipes on Pinterest instead of typing them out, printing them up, sliding them into sheet protectors, and storing them in a huge notebook. I can go online to get advice for cleaning my ceramic tile kitchen floor or to upload videos of the kids for far away family to see. And if I discover that I am out of sour cream right in the middle of making Sour Cream Fudge Cake, I can google for substitutes and avoid disaster (and I did!).

But it is precisely because the Internet can be so useful, so beneficial, so enjoyable, that it can also be so dangerous. For it is often the good things that distract us from the best things. And never before have so many good

things been so easy to access, just a click away.

So we're going to start a new *girltalk* conversation today--about pinning and prayer, hashtags and our homes, blogs and biblical womanhood. Join us, won't you?

Line It Up

by Carolyn Mahaney

"But everyone else is doing it!"

What mom hasn't been on the receiving end of this argument from a child? And what mom hasn't o-so-cleverly retorted: "If everyone else jumped off a cliff, would you jump too?"

As silly as a child's reasoning may be, we often approach our online habits in the same childish manner. A new website entices us with its beautiful pictures or clever writing, or a new platform makes it easier for us to connect with others, to receive and share information and conversation. *And everyone else is doing it!*

We assume (like the child) that it must be OK. More than that, it must be good and desirable. More than that, we must have it, use it, be involved. We can't possibly miss out on this opportunity! So with nary a nod to our conscience or a thought for God's Word, we jump off the latest online cliff.

This little series aims to help us all stop and think. But more than that, to evaluate our online habits in light of God's Word.

As one of my heroes in the faith, Elisabeth Elliot, has said "we can't really tell how crooked our thinking is until we line it up with the straight edge of Scripture." We must hold up the time and manner of our Internet use next to the Bible and see how crooked or straight it is. We must ask: *are my online habits dictated, directed, and in line with the Word of God?*

Given the pervasive influence of the Internet in every corner of our lives, surely we can agree on the importance of this question. And even though Holy Scripture was written thousands of years before the human invention of the Internet, in the fathomless wisdom of God its truth is ever-prescient. And as often happens when we come to God's Word, we may be surprised by what we find.

So do you have your Straight Edge ready? Let's measure.

Is Google Making Us (Spiritually) Blind?

by Nicole Whitacre

I became nearsighted in high school around the time I started using a computer for hours every day at work. I don't know if there's a connection between the two. After a quick Google search (ironic!) I learned that the evidence is inconclusive.

But I do know one thing for sure: our online habits can make us spiritually nearsighted. Worse than that, they can make us so nearsighted that we become spiritually blind. That's what it says in 2 Peter 1:5-9:

*"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, **they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."*

The promise of the Internet is that it will open our eyes to new worlds. It is supposed to make us more connected, more efficient, more knowledgeable. And it can! But this verse tells us that the opposite can also happen. There is a very real danger that instead of learning more, we may know less. Instead of loving more we may love less. Instead of remembering more we may remember less.

As we stare at our computer screens, we may be going spiritually blind.

So let's pull out this Scriptural straight edge and measure: *Do my online habits make me more or less effective in my knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?*

Do the articles and websites I read online make me more virtuous?

Does the time I spend on Facebook result in more brotherly affection and love for others?

Does my activity on Pinterest make me more self-controlled?

Do my tweets help me and others grow in steadfast faith and endurance?

Do my online habits contribute to a greater knowledge of God's Word?

If the answer is "no" to any of these questions, then our Internet use may be making us ineffective or unfruitful in our knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be causing us to forget that we were cleansed from our past sins. With every click and view, we may be going blind to the gospel.

Our Connected Heart

by Carolyn Mahaney

One of the mistakes we make when we go online is to assume that because it is virtual, it is unrelated to virtue. That because things are out there on the Internet, they have no internal effect on our souls. But did you know there is an invisible yet very real string that runs from our laptop screen to our hearts? The question is, which way is it tugging us?

"Keep your heart with all vigilance," the wise father urges in Proverbs, "for from it flow the springs of life" (4.23).

In the digital age, we understand vigilance--only we call it "staying connected." We check Facebook countless times per day to see what our friends are up to or if they've left any messages on our wall. We have "push" on our phones to alert us of the latest tweet or message. We have news readers that bring us the most recent posts from all around the world wide web. When it comes to our online habits, we are nothing if not vigilant.

But what about our hearts? Do we have alerts set up to warn us if our hearts are being negatively influenced by our Internet habits? Are we constantly monitoring our affections for the things of God? *What springs are flowing from our online activity?*

It doesn't take long for the "springs" of my online life to become polluted. I click on a few decorating blogs and before I know it I'm complaining about all the areas in my home that I wish I could change but don't have the time, talent, or resources. Or, I log on to check the latest news and end up fighting anxiety over the most recent economic crisis, local crime wave, or political development.

Most often, the effect of my Internet use on my heart is gradual. Almost imperceptible. Over time I can become more in tune with the immediate and less aware of the eternal. More dissatisfied with what God has given me and more aware of what others have. More excited about what I can discover online and less excited about what I discover in God's Word.

The straight edge of Proverbs 4:23 reveals the crookedness of our hearts. And so we would do well to pray with the old hymn:

Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,

Bind my wandering heart to Thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,

Prone to leave the God I love;

Here's my heart, O take and seal it,

Seal it for Thy courts above.

First Things

by Carolyn Mahaney

What's the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning? Stumble to the coffee maker? Brush your teeth? [According to a 2010 study](#), at least one third of young women *check Facebook* first thing in the morning--even before they go to the bathroom! This study might be two years old, but I'm guessing, if anything, those numbers have only gone up.

Now it's not wrong to check Facebook before you go to the bathroom. But we need to consider what our first thoughts and actions say about what we *want* most, what we think we *need* most.

Do you wake up more aware of that itch to see what's happening online or are your first morning sensations of your desperate need for God? Does a few minutes with your laptop pull you out of bed more readily than a few minutes with your Bible?

It's so easy to dismiss the simple pleasures of Pinterest or Facebook as harmless activities. But that's exactly why we need to be careful. Even

simple pleasures, *especially* simple pleasures, can drain our affections for God. John Piper has famously made the point:

“If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great.” (*Hunger for God*, p. 23)

Each morning, how do you stuff your soul? With small things online, or great truths in God's Word?

Our morning desires and activities, our *first thoughts and inclinations*, should be like the Psalmist: to hear, sing, pray, and be satisfied with the steadfast love of the Lord (5.3, 59.16, 90.14, 143.8). To put first things first.

Facebook, Friendship, and the Local Church

by Nicole Whitacre

The messages from [Next](#) are online and I'm working my way through all of them. I love how the Internet makes it possible for a thirty-something mother of four children to benefit from a conference for teenagers and twenty-somethings that happened two weeks ago, a thousand miles away.

But I wanted to mention one session in particular, because in his message [The Church and Friendship](#), Kevin DeYoung touches on a topic we'll get to later in our series--that of technology and friendship:

"Friendship is wonderful when you can get it, but it is frequently hard to come by...There is a real sense in which that technology can foster friendship... And yet as good as the technology is...the danger with friends today is that we have friends everywhere and friends nowhere. We have a lot of relationships but how many friendships? We have more acquaintances than ever before, we have more people in our networks than ever before, we are known by more people and can know more people than ever before and yet have no friends."

Do you have friends? Or, more importantly, as Kevin asks, "What kind of friend are you? A fake friend, a foul friend, or a faithful friend?"

[Listen](#) and learn how to be a biblical, better, friend.

Where Did the Time Go?

by Nicole Whitacre

Not that long ago my mother kept in touch with friends and family via a telephone tethered to the wall in the kitchen. She bought the longest cord available so that maybe, if she worked it right, she could reach the coffee table in the living room. But basically, if she wanted to connect, it had to be in the kitchen.

To find the best stroller, she had to ask each of her friends for a personal recommendation, look up the stroller in a borrowed copy of Consumer Reports, and drive around to local stores to find the best price. And if Mom wanted to go somewhere for the first time she had to call for directions, write them out by hand on a piece of paper, and then hope she wouldn't get lost and need to stop at a gas station or pay phone.

It's only been twenty-five years, but compared to my mom, I have the equivalent of a full-time personal assistant. I can connect with friends anytime, anywhere. I can research, purchase, and schedule delivery for the latest stroller in five minutes without getting up from the couch. I never have to ask for directions. My smart phone redirects me when I'm lost, instantly provides me with reviews, tips, and solutions; and if I wanted it to, it could even babysit my children.

It still doesn't clean the toilets. But in truth, there's something comforting about that.

So why is my generation of women more busy, overwhelmed, and anxious? We should have vast amounts of time on our hands in order to rest, read Scripture, ponder and pray. And yet our lives seem increasingly hectic compared to the world in which we were raised. Why?

Think about it, and let's talk more tomorrow.

Because We Want To

by Nicole Whitacre

Why do our lives--which should be simpler and easier--seem all the more complicated? Centuries before the Internet, Blaise Pascal answered that question: *Our lives are busier because we want them to be.**

Peter Kreeft summarizes Pascal's perspective:

"We *want* to complexify our lives. We don't have to, we *want* to. We wanted to be harried and hassled and busy. Unconsciously, we want the very things we complain about. For if we had leisure, we would look at ourselves and listen to our hearts and see the great gaping hole in our hearts and be terrified, because that hole is so big that nothing but God can fill it."

"Diversion" explains Douglas Groothuis, "serves to distract humans from a plight too terrible to encounter directly—namely, our mortality, finitude, and failures. There is... [a] tension between our aspirations and our anticipations and the reality of our lives."

Every day we face difficult, even heart-breaking realities: Our sin and failures, the disappointments of life, the difficulty of relationships, the unanswered questions, the tension between the way we want things to be and the way they really are. And our tablets and smartphones seem to open up a portal of "escape" from whatever it is we don't want to think about. By going online we can, for a few moments anyway, forget what is troubling us or ignore what should be troubling us. So we give ourselves over to our online diversions.

"Postmodern people are perpetually restless" observes Dr. Groothuis, "they frequently seek solace in diversion instead of satisfaction in truth."

Where do you seek solace? Where do you find satisfaction?

Our hearts are restless until they rest...*online*?

*(*Much of the content of today's post, and the idea for yesterday's post are from ["Addicted to Diversion and Afraid of Silence,"](#) a post by Justin Taylor. I highly recommend you read the entire post.)*

Different, Yet the Same

by Nicole Whitacre

At bedtime lately, I've been enjoying a little light reading (on my Iphone!) with the free download of the Agatha Christie mystery novels. In *Murder on the Links*, the famous detective Hercule Poirot goes head to head with another, younger detective who is full of modern ideas and methods. When they first meet, his rival addresses him with a thinly veiled condescension:

"I know you by name, Monsieur Poirot,' he said. 'You cut quite a figure in the old days, didn't you? But methods are very different now.'

'Crimes, though, are very much the same,' remarked Poirot gently."

Methods are certainly different now. The Internet has radically transformed our way of doing just about everything in the space of a few years. And it shows no signs of stopping. The latest technology, websites, and social media platforms we use today may very well be outdated or obsolete by this time next year.

Crimes, though, are very much the same. We still drink from the polluted waters of our sinful desires instead of guarding our hearts with all diligence. We still nibble at the same table of the world as did our ancestors. And our diversions may be more accessible than ever before, but the urge to escape reality is nothing new.

That's why as Christians we must flee to the cross and to our Savior Jesus Christ who *"is the same yesterday and today and forever"* (Rom 13.8). Our online temptations or sins have not put us beyond the reach of His forgiveness or His power to change our hearts. His promises remain:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)

and

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence" (2 Pet. 1:3).

So as we consider ways our online habits and actions may need to change in order to line up with God's Word, let our methods always start and end at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Our Search Engine

by Nicole Whitacre

When we go online we are searching for something. It may be an email or the latest news or a DIY decorating project. But quite often there is more to our search than what we type into Google. We may be searching for the feeling of affirmation we get when someone likes our status update on

Facebook or sends us a direct message. Or we search to satiate our curiosity--about people we know, their distant relations, celebrities we will never meet. We may be searching for the pleasure that comes from imagining the delectable food we can create, the gorgeous rooms we can remake.

Searching, searching, searching. We spend so much time searching; but how rarely do we find satisfaction. As studies and our own experience tell us, Facebook and other social media can actually leave us more unsettled and unhappy than before. But still we keep searching. The question is: what are we searching for?

In Deuteronomy God tells the Israelites that one day they will turn from serving idols and *"from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul"* (4.29). This promise was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Through His atoning death and resurrection we can turn from our idols and find God! And our search for God will fully and forever satisfy!

But this promise is conditional. We will find God only *if* we search, and only if we search with *all* our heart and *all* our soul. So what--or *who*--is your heart and soul searching after today?

Choosing One Thing

by Carolyn Mahaney

Searching for--and finding--satisfaction in God, instead of in online diversions, is simple, really. We must *choose* to close the laptop or shut off the smart phone, and we must *choose* to daily seek God through prayer and His Word.

Just like Mary. She *"sat at Jesus' feet and listened to his teaching."* In Jesus' own words, *"Mary has **chosen** the good portion, which will not be taken away from her"* (Luke 10:39, 42, emphasis mine).

Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet by deliberately ignoring distractions, even good ones like serving! Martha on the other hand was busy and anxious. Today we face distractions of a different sort, but there are so many more, and they are right there with us at the touch of the finger or the click of the mouse, from the moment we wake up until we go to bed. So we must be all the more alert to what may distract us from keeping our daily appointment

to sit at Jesus' feet, from choosing "the one thing that is necessary" (Lk 10:41).

I've shared this before, but a while back, I found that the Internet was becoming a big distraction first thing in the morning. I was using the five minutes it took for my coffee to brew each morning to quickly check email, or headline news, or maybe a blog or two, *before* starting my devotions. I'd check a headline and then I just had to read the story; or I'd check a blog I enjoy, and I just had to check out the link they recommended, or I'd get caught up not just looking at my email, but answering it.

Before I knew it, five minutes would turn into twenty minutes and then my quiet time would be cut short.

So, I knew I needed to make a choice. I had to choose to say "no" to this distraction! I resolved to not look at email or blogs or headline news until *after* my time of Bible study and prayer. It may be a small thing but it has made a big difference.

Whatever it takes, let's be ruthless about not allowing anything to distract us from seeking God through His Word and prayer. We need to *choose* to sit at Jesus' feet and find our satisfaction in God alone.

"Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days" (90:14).

A Cheap Substitute?

by Nicole Whitacre

Recently, Karen wrote in response to the post, ["Because We Want To"](#):

As I read it I thought, "Yes, people are like this, restless and wanting diversion from reality." And I realized as I read that I can understand people who don't know Christ seeking solace in the distraction of the Internet, perfectly logical. But why does it also often describe me, as a believer? And not just me obviously or you wouldn't be writing this series.

What have we missed in our understanding of our faith and our life in Jesus that we could fall into such a cheap substitute for real rest and peace? How could we buy this lie?

It's something I will be thinking and praying about much more in the weeks ahead--and discussing with my friends (not on-line!) Thank you for your wise use of technology that is opening my eyes to face this and to hopefully in the process, draw closer to Jesus through His word. I am so glad He is the real source of peace in a heart-breaking world.

Our hope for this little conversation is to provoke all of us to ask heart questions like Karen. And to find our answers, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in the Word of God. Out of hearts satisfied in Christ, may we steward the gift of the Internet in such a way that keeps us from being "ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:5-9).

We'll pick up the conversation next week, talking about online habits and home life.

Is Anyone Home?

by Nicole Whitacre

"My mother was always there, but never there."

This quote has haunted me for years, in a good way. I can't find the original source, but it is what I remember from an interview with the grown daughter of a well-known feminist editor. Her mom worked from home, but as far as her daughter was concerned, her mom was not *present* at home. She might as well not have been there at all.

I realized when I read this that it is possible to be a "stay-at-home mom" but not consistently stay at home. To be there for my kids in body but not in spirit. To get them breakfast, lunch, and dinner, provide clean clothes and shuttle service, but not give them ***my full attention***.

Nothing less than my full attention is required, though, if I am to fulfill my biblical responsibilities as a mother: to teach them diligently (Deut 6:6-9), discipline them lovingly (Prov. 13:24), love them constantly (Titus 2:3-5).

And nothing can distract me from caring for my children faster than my Internet connection.

Going online takes the edge off the harder aspects of mothering. It thaws that icy feeling of isolation. It scratches that itch for "intelligent"

conversation. It momentarily frees me from the mundane. And checking in with my phone or laptop for "just a moment" doesn't seem like such a big deal.

But all of those moments come at a steep price. If my kids have to say my name three times before I look up because I'm glued to a fascinating article on my computer, or if I'm constantly checking my Twitter feed but fail to notice one of my children is speaking unkindly to his siblings, or if I go online every day (many times a day) but go several days in a row without praying for my children, what will my mothering legacy be?

One day, when my two sons and two daughters think back on their childhood home will they remember me as being fully, attentively, happily *there*?

A Mother's Mission

by Carolyn Mahaney

Mothers are responsible to mold and shape lives; to raise children who, in the words of G.K. Chesterton, "require not so much to be taught anything as everything."

"I might as well be at the controls of a moon shot," reflected one mom, "the mission is so grave and vast." And so it is. The training and discipline of our children in the fear the Lord is an awesome task, demanding of our full attention (see Deut 6:5-9).

That's why, if there's one concern I have for this new generation of mothers, it is the potential for distraction.

Blogs, Facebook, Twitter and texting allow moms at home to stay connected with the outside world like never before; the Internet makes it possible for women to contribute skills and gifts to the church and the marketplace, while at home with their children. These are all tremendous blessings, and when used wisely, can bless and serve our families and glorify God.

The Proverbs 31 women, long before the Internet, managed a wide range of tasks for the good of her family and community. (But did you notice what time she woke up each morning?) Depending on a woman's capacity, gifting, personal discipline, as well as the ages and number of children, there may certainly be room for other things.

But we must be watchful that these “other things” don’t distract us from our primary task of mothering. We must walk carefully through this season, with all its opportunities, and make the best use of our time with our children.

Truth is, we can’t effectively train our children on the side. We can’t discipline them here and there. We can’t teach when we’ve got a free moment. We can’t mother intermittently.

Inconsistent training is ineffective training.

If we are distracted by projects or pleasure, we may miss valuable teaching moments, opportunities to encourage, disobedience that requires discipline, or a chance to show affection. These moments, once lost, are gone forever.

So ladies, may I encourage you, as I do my own daughters, to give training and discipline your first and full attention. Walk carefully, and keep your eyes on the mothering road.

Your Inbox, Our Blog, and the Laundry Pile

by Carolyn Mahaney

In a recent note, Heather describes a scenario most of us can probably relate to:

Dear Girltalkers,

I am so so grateful that you have brought up the internet as our latest discussion topic. Before I had baby Ellie last June, I worked in a job where I got several emails a minute, and so checking my computer screen regularly was important. Since leaving work, I have (rather sadly) continued with this same habit--except now I have no more than the occasional email from Amazon, eBay or the Baby Centre, or from sympathetic friends who know that I still treat my inbox as though it belonged to a lawyer! And because my inbox is empty, I comfort myself by checking Facebook, searching new recipes or - wait for it - seeing whether you've written again on your blog!! As you say, none of these things are bad in themselves but they frequently distract me from what I really should be doing. The washing stays in the machine, dinner remains unprepared and my husband arrives home to find his wife glued to a computer screen.

So thank you for addressing a topic which I have known in my heart I'm struggling with. My Straight Edge is at the ready!

Love Heather

Like Heather, most of us have a sense that something needs to change about our online habits, that all is not quite right in the way we handle technology in our homes. But how much time online is too much? When have we crossed the line from harmless diversion to harmful distraction? (e.g. Is it wrong to read our blog about biblical womanhood when the laundry isn't folded yet?) And how do we go about making wise and appropriate changes?

We'll set these questions up against the Straight Edge of Scripture in the next few days.

A Question of Priorities

by Carolyn Mahaney

So how do we know if we're distracted or focused on the right things? We need to determine biblical priorities for our season, and then consistently evaluate whether or not we are living according to those priorities. For moms with young kids, it's pretty simple. Three non-negotiables top the list:

1. The gospel (1 Cor. 15:3)
2. Your husband (Tit. 2:3-5, Eph. 5:23-33)
3. Your children (Deut. 6:4-9 Tit. 2:3-5)

Ask yourself: *Am I preserving these biblical priorities as my top priorities?*

Then consider your daily Internet or cell phone habits and ask yourself:

Does my time spent online cut into my time for consistent practice of the spiritual disciplines?

Does Facebook hinder me from putting my husband's needs first?

Does twitter or texting distract me from the teaching, training, discipline, care and encouragement of my children?

Do my Internet habits cause me to be rushed, hurried, distracted or anxious in caring for my family and training my children?

If we're consistent at checking our Facebook wall but not in prayer, or if we're attentive to our Etsy site or blog but not our children, then we need to make a change.

First Things First

by Carolyn Mahaney

If less important activities are infringing upon more important priorities, we need to make a change. But what does this look like?

Does this mean that moms can't have a life beyond warming milk bottles and reading bedtime stories or helping with homework and driving to soccer games?

Of course not! But given the significant amount of time it takes to effectively teach, train, discipline, care for, and encourage children, you won't have time for much else. Motherhood should consume a majority of your time and attention

So how do we eliminate online distractions and that keep us from focusing on our children?

Let me return to a previous [illustration](#). You may remember how I realized that browsing online while my coffee was brewing each morning ended up cutting into my time with God's Word. So, I set up a boundary for myself: no email or blogs until I have my quiet time. This wasn't legalistic. It was simply a personal resolution to protect the most important from the less important, to keep first things first.

We can apply this same principle to the priorities of mothering and caring for our homes. What structures do you need to set up in your life to keep the training of your children a priority? Maybe you need to refrain from looking at email until the kids go down for a nap, or wake up a half hour earlier to update your blog, or only browse Pinterest or Facebook after the dinner dishes are done. Maybe more drastic action is necessary. You may need to refrain from certain online activities for a time.

Whatever it takes, let me encourage you to clear away all distractions. There's a time for every season under heaven, and the time to train your children in the ways of the Lord is *now*.

Too Busy Not To Check Facebook

by Nicole Whitacre

Angela writes:

I have read your posts about distractions on the Internet. You were talking about priorities. And we all know how important it is to set priorities in our lives. The gospel and God should come first, then your husband and then your children, you said. But as I am not married yet, how should my priorities list look like? Of course, God comes first, but then?

A couple of years ago we did an extended series called "Best Deals" based on Ephesians 5:15-16:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ([Ephesians 5:15-17 ESV](#))

Sometimes, as a single it is easy to feel like your time is your own. No one is banging on your bathroom door and the laundry pile doesn't explode overnight. So *why does it matter if I waste a little time online?* you may wonder. But when viewed in terms of God's kingdom, how we use our time always matters.

God's calling for you as a single woman without kids is no less urgent or strategic than for a woman with children. We are *all* to walk carefully and wisely, "*making the best use of our time because the days are evil.*"

Our series kicked off with a look at God's plan for the different seasons of our lives ([part one](#), [two](#), [three](#)), taken from our book, [Shopping for Time](#). Then we suggested seven "best deals" for single women, all to be lived out in the context of the local church:

[Pursue Undivided Devotion](#)

[Become a Theologian](#)

[Help the Men](#)

[Choose Friends Carefully](#)

[Nurture Children](#)

[Prepare To be a Wife and Mother](#)

[Be Devoted to Good Works](#)

You can also download these posts in [PDF format](#).

Thank you for your question and may God give the desire of your heart to find the "best deals" for His glory!

Don't Forget to Remember

by Nicole Whitacre

So how do we maintain a clear biblical vision of motherhood that helps us resist distraction? It's simple really. We need to have a routine whereby we regularly return to God's Word and to biblical resources on parenting.

I was at Janelle's house a few weeks ago helping her to finish unpacking her bedroom. In the basket by her bed (amongst several bills, a cable to who knows what, an old cell phone or two, and an Agatha Christie novel that needs to be returned to *my* sister-in-law) were several books on motherhood as well as a few verses on note cards to encourage her in praying for and training her children. We de-cluttered the basket, but replaced the Bible, notecards, and books by her bed. Just having these resources with her quiet time stuff reminds Janelle to re-read them, even if its just for a few minutes here or there.

Given our selfish hearts, the ever-present online distractions, and the world's misguided messages on motherhood, we can't afford *not* to be regularly reminding ourselves of what our biblical mission is as mothers. I am not nearly as consistent at this as Janelle is, but when I am, I find myself growing in the fear of the Lord, dependence upon Him, and joy in motherhood. And once again, it focuses me on what's important, so I'm less inclined to be distracted.

There are many great resources out there, both old and new. I return often

to [J.C. Ryle](#), [Elisabeth Elliot](#), [Tedd Tripp](#) and my mom's chapters in [Feminine Appeal](#). Or you can listen to audio messages or collect articles and blog posts that serve you. The recent article we recommended by James Hamilton on A Biblical Theology of Motherhood is definitely one I'm going to re-read often. Reviewing verses on parenting from Proverbs, Deuteronomy 6, Ephesians 5, Proverbs 31, Titus 2, or Psalm 128 all reorient my mothering God-ward.

Contrary to what some may think, routinely reviewing biblically grounded resources on motherhood should not lead to a legalistic, gospel-less existence, but instead drive us to the cross once again. For few things in my life reveals the depth of my sin and my need for a Savior, or the limitless riches of God's grace, like being a mom. And focused on the cross (and not on my Facebook page) is where my eyes need to be.

Changing Our Online Habits

by Nicole Whitacre

Emma and Jennie wrote us to tell us how they are applying our [current series](#) on the Internet:

Jennie:

I wanted to thank you for the current series on living intentionally, particularly as it relates to the use of the internet. The Lord has really used it to convict me to turn off my computer (which for me means email, Facebook, Pinterest, etc.) and focus my heart and mind more faithfully on my home and, more importantly, my two precious children (ages 3 and 1)! I have known for awhile that that internet has had too much of a draw on my time and affections, but not until I read Carolyn and Nicole's posts ("[A Mother's Mission](#)" and "[Is Anyone Home?](#)") that I was sobered enough to actually change my habits. I want my kids to see their mother devoted not to the internet, but to Christ and the responsibilities He has given me. I pray that the Lord will continue to give me grace to put off the inordinate desire for distraction and entertainment and give myself more diligently being a wife, mother and homemaker. Thank you for your encouragement and help in this regard!

Emma:

I wanted to thank you so much for your current series on the internet! Today, I was reading through all the series posts and my heart was so convicted. I am a 20-year-old nursing student from Australia and so I certainly have a lot of responsibilities that come with this season of my life. Today I realised that my priorities do not reflect a heart that is set on seeking God first! Being a distance student, the majority of my study is done through the computer so the internet takes a rather large portion of my time.

Today, I realised it takes too much. Today, before I had even left my bed (how lazy!) I checked Facebook on my iphone. I then turned on my computer and checked emails, Facebook again and my blogfeed as well. I then commenced my study. It was while I was on my study break that I read your current series - I immediately stopped what I was doing and spent time with God in His Word and had my prayer time.

Now I have a new rule: my computer does not go on and my phone remains untouched every day until after I have spent time with the Lord. Thank you for addressing such an important topic, it certainly opened my eyes to bad habits that, with the Lord's help, I will endeavour to change from now on!

Thank you Jennie and Emma for your example of obedience to God's Word! We're all provoked to consider: What is one way we need to change our online habits this week to put first things first?

"...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." [Hebrews 12:1](#)

What If We Made Your Browsing History Public?

by Nicole Whitacre

We've talked a lot about the Internet and our priorities, our time, and our homes. But the temptations don't stop there. We must not only be watchful over how much time we spend online, but also the content of what we are clicking, reading, viewing, searching for and commenting on.

As we browse the web, what kind of ideas and images we are dumping into the well-spring of our lives ([Prov. 4:23](#))? And what kind of content are we posting online? Is it pure? Peace loving? Full of kindness and good fruit

[\(James 3:13-18\)?](#)

Consider your browsing history from yesterday. Would you be happy to project its contents onto a big screen at church for all to see? Or would you feel uncomfortable if godly friends discovered how you spent your time reading and commenting?

The inescapable truth is that what we do online doesn't stay online. It is who we are.

And who we are, virtually and actually, is the focus of our conversation over the next few days.

Are We Connecting?

by Nicole Whitacre

Social media is great because it allows us to "stay connected" with family and friends, right? Let's reconsider that assumption for a moment: How much of your social media time is actually spent meaningfully connecting--and I'm talking about more than the occasional "like"--and how much time is spent merely looking at your feed?

Our use of social media is often *more passive* than we realize. I'd wager to say we do lots more looking at posts and pictures and uploads than actual connecting with others.

In this digital age, eavesdropping has gone viral. No longer is it simply the woman straining to hear the conversation at the nearby table or a coworker listening in on a phone call. Now we "listen in" on hundreds of friends, family, and friends of friends (read: strangers) around the world, no matter where we are or where they are. And this passive, detached, skimming of social media sites consumes a large percentage of our time online.

But our use of social media is also *more active* than we realize. While we think we are only "looking" at our feed, a whole lot more may be going on in our thoughts and hearts than we discern. For human nature is such that we almost never observe other people passively or impartially. We can't resist bringing ourselves into the picture. In fact, we do this so automatically that we often don't even know it's happening.

And thus, "connecting" can quickly become sinful comparing.

“Seeing” the Followers

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them...When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" [John 21:20-22](#)

Long before social media, Peter was tempted to sinfully compare. He received some disturbing news about his future martyr's death, and his gut-reaction was to "turn"--to turn away from the Savior to look at the disciple following them. Chances are this wasn't the first time Peter was tempted to compare his lot with John's. After all, he can't have failed to notice before that John was "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

But consider, if John hadn't been following them, if Peter had been the only disciple, what would his response have been to Jesus' announcement? John's presence wasn't the cause of Peter's sin, but it sure served to expose his heart!

While John and Peter could hardly have imagined the development of Twitter and Facebook, our Savior did. Walking on the beach that post-resurrection day, He not only sought to lovingly instruct Peter, he had you and me in mind as well.

And Jesus' rebuke to Peter is more urgent than ever. For instead of one disciple, we now have a huge crowd "following" us everywhere on our smart phone or laptop. The temptations to turn from Jesus and sinfully "see" others have multiplied a hundred-fold.

Every time we use social media we encounter people who have it better than we do (or so it seems!). And not just a few people, but many! We only have to skim our feed to observe marriages that appear stronger, children that are more lovable, women who have more friends, more talents, more money, more leisure time, more followers, more respect, more likes, more everything!

It all blurs together and soon it feels like *everyone* has a great life except for us. And we turn. We look away from the Savior and His call and grace and we compare our life to another disciple, or to a composite made up of a hundred others. No wonder studies show Facebook often leaves people

depressed!

But our Savior, in His infinite love and wisdom, has anticipated these temptations. And he says to us, just as he did to Peter so many centuries ago, "What is that to you? You follow me!"

WSJ: "Are We All Braggarts Now?"

by Nicole Whitacre

Last week, while we were talking about the temptation to compare ourselves to others when using Facebook or Twitter, Elizabeth Bernstein of the Wall Street Journal was examining the other side of the social media coin--the rise in online bragging and how we respond:

"Clearly, the Internet has given us a global audience for our bombast, and social media sites encourage it. We're all expected to be perfect all the time. The result is more people carefully stage-managing their online image....

'It's become a phenomenon where if someone posts a status update and 500 people see it and no one objects, it must be true,' says Jennifer Mirsky, 45, a digital content strategist in New York.

'But could it really be that everyone else has a husband as thoughtful as the heroes of romance novels, children who combine the brilliance of Einstein with the winning charms of Shirley Temple, and jobs packed with wall-to-wall glamorous events?' ([Read More...](#))

As Christians, our Facebook wall should not be a boastful façade, but a true reflection of who we are in Christ. We should not present ourselves as "perfect all the time," but as striving for holiness because our Savior was "perfect all the time."

Instead of "stage-managing" our online image we should focus on serving others.

In other words, our Facebook feed should display *humility* born of the gospel.

So before you press "publish" ask yourself:

~Does this post paint a true or false picture of who I really am and what my

life is like?

~Am I seeking to serve and edify, or to impress people with this tweet?

~Does this content draw attention to me, or to my Savior who has been so good to me?

Let's not be braggarts now, or ever.

"Do nothing [on Facebook or Twitter] from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

Philippians 2:3

The (Online) Snare of Compare

by Nicole Whitacre

If you identified with Peter in [last week's post](#), and find yourself tempted to sinful comparison--especially when using social media--then let me encourage you to [watch](#) (or re-watch!) Mom's message on "The Snare of Compare" from the recent [Gospel Coalition Women's Conference](#). Even though I have heard this message many times now, I never tire of it. Maybe that's because I so easily give into this temptation to compare myself to others, no matter what my season or situation in life. And so I am in constant need of our Savior's gracious, perspective-restoring rebuke: "What is that to you? You follow me!"

[The Snare of Compare \(John 21:15-22\) - Carolyn Mahaney](#) from [The Gospel Coalition](#) on [Vimeo](#).

You can also [download the PDF](#) of our series on this topic from a couple years ago.

Q&A: "God Comes First, But Then?"

by Nicole Whitacre

Angela writes:

I have read your posts about distractions on the Internet. You were talking about priorities. And we all know how important it is to set priorities in our lives. The gospel and God should come first, then your husband and then your children, you said. But as I am not married yet,

how should my priorities list look like? Of course, God comes first, but then?

A couple of years ago we did an extended series called "Best Deals" based on Ephesians 5:15-16:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ([Ephesians 5:15-17 ESV](#))

Sometimes, as a single it is easy to feel like your time is your own. No one is banging on your bathroom door and the laundry pile doesn't explode overnight. *So why does it matter if I waste a little time online?* you may wonder. But when viewed in terms of God's kingdom, how we use our time always matters.

God's calling for you as a single woman without kids is no less urgent or strategic than for a woman with children. We are *all* to walk carefully and wisely, "*making the best use of our time because the days are evil.*"

Our series kicked off with a look at God's plan for the different seasons of our lives ([part one](#), [two](#), [three](#)), taken from our book, [Shopping for Time](#). Then we suggested seven "best deals" for single women, all to be lived out in the context of the local church:

[Pursue Undivided Devotion](#)

[Become a Theologian](#)

[Help the Men](#)

[Choose Friends Carefully](#)

[Nurture Children](#)

[Prepare To be a Wife and Mother](#)

[Be Devoted to Good Works](#)

You can also download these posts in [PDF format](#).

Thank you for your question and may God give the desire of your heart to find the "best deals" for His glory!

Not So Helpful

by Nicole Whitacre

A while ago I told my husband that whenever I went to a particular online parenting forum, I came away feeling anxious about our children. He simply (and wisely) told me not to read it.

But sometimes the simplest advice is the hardest to take.

A few weeks ago, another update from this group appeared in my inbox and the headline caught my attention. *I'm OK now, I can handle it*, I thought. *And besides, It's important for me to be informed on this issue.* So I clicked.

Big mistake.

The post, by a woman I have never met, was about a crisis in her family. And my mind began racing, a mile a minute, wondering if we were on the verge of a similar disaster. *Am I missing the warning signs? What if this happens to us?*

My husband shook his head and smiled, as if to say *"You could have avoided all this anxiety, if only you had taken my advice!"* to which I offered no argument. He then explained why he did not think we were on the verge of a family crisis, and patiently led me back to the relevant truths from God's Word.

The Internet age has conditioned us to think that because we *can* read everything, we *should* read everything. In fact, we think we have a kind of obligation to be "informed." We must have "all the facts."

But we must reexamine this "obligation to be informed" or this "right to know" from a biblical perspective. When the Corinthians tried to insist "All things are lawful for me" Paul rejoined "but not all things are helpful...I will not be dominated by anything" ([1 Cor. 6:12](#)).

So let's hold this straight edge up against our online browsing habits:

It is "lawful" to read an online news source, but is it helpful for you?

It is "lawful" to visit online forums or chat rooms but does it build you up in the gospel? Does it build others up in the gospel?

It is "lawful" to follow certain Twitter or Facebook feeds, but is it always helpful?

In God's kingdom, the prize doesn't go to the "well-informed", the one who knows everything about everything and everyone, but rather to the one *who knows the God who knows everything*: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom...but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me...declares the LORD." ([Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV](#))

With that in mind, less time on the Internet and more time in God's Word seems, in what must be a massive understatement, *helpful*.

An Online Check-Up

by Nicole Whitacre

In today's health-conscious culture we carefully monitor our diets. We count calories and cut carbs and buy organic, because as everyone knows, you are what you eat.

But how much attention do we give our online diet? Do we monitor our intake of information or consider its effect on our souls?

Some of us might have a regular online diet of breaking news, medical information, and stories of loss, tragedy, and heartbreak via social media. We gobble up a huge helping of unhealthy content each morning and snack on it throughout the day. And then we wonder why we are so fearful all the time.

Here's what can happen to me: I check an online news source only to see a headline about a kidnapping, and I fear for the safety of my grandchildren. Another plane crash or terrorist plot and I worry about C.J.'s flight home. The local police report indicates a rise in burglaries and I can't sleep at night.

Whenever we read about something bad happening somewhere else, we may be tempted to imagine it happening to us. And information about bad things happening is *everywhere* on the Internet!

That's why we would do well to remember Elisabeth Elliot's statement of truth (and I can't help but wonder what her thoughts might be about our online habits!): "There is no grace for our imagination." Instead, God's

grace is found in the warning to flee these temptations: “*Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil*” ([Ps. 37:8](#)).

So if you find yourself tempted to fret, start by evaluating your online diet. Is it regularly feeding your fearful imagination? If so, then maybe you should choose not to click.

From the E-mail Bag: Turning to God’s Word First

by Nicole Whitacre

Girltalk has always been an extension of our mother-daughter conversations, and we benefit even more when you join in. A great example is this email from Kim who was challenged by last week's look at temptations to fear on the Internet. May we all be encouraged by her resolve to spend less time online and more time in God's Word!

I am so thankful for your current series on our online habits. Your words have challenged me to take a closer look at exactly what I'm spending my time on when I'm online. I tend to seek information re: health problems or issues to my detriment - there's nothing wrong with seeking information on a symptom here and there but it easily can become something that consumes my mind when I'm checking Google daily for new information on the same strange symptoms and then worrying about exactly what I'm not sure I even have! Nothing online can answer my health questions directly and I'm sad to say I often turn first to the Internet for counsel than the Word of God. I asked myself today how would my soul have benefited if I had spent the 30 minutes in God's word or prayer rather than online checking again about my strange health symptoms. I was saddened by my choice and am thankful though for the Lord's grace and that He lovingly corrects and disciplines us. And I'm glad He has done that through your message series as well. Thank you for your faithfulness to Him and His Word! Your message has encouraged me to go on a Facebook and Internet fast (aside from paying bills online which would not benefit from my fast) and instead turn to the Word of God first. Thank you again!

Beware the Internet Idler

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not." [1 Timothy 5:13](#)

"*I'm glad I'm not like that*" is often my first response when I come across one of these unflattering portraits in Scripture.

Surely I don't bear any resemblance to these lazy, gossipy young widows? I work each day to serve my family. I get up early. I clean, cook, drive, counsel, encourage, wash, iron and pray. I don't spend my mornings on the couch clicking the remote or my afternoons gossiping with the neighbors.

But have I "learned to be an idler" through my online habits? Going from Facebook page to Facebook page?

This verse highlights a particular danger of the Internet: it can lure us into idleness. We may not be "going about from house to house" physically, but doing it virtually instead.

So I must ask myself: *Have I become an Internet idler?*

It may be that I bear more resemblance to these idle young women than I thought at first.

How to Learn to Be Lazy

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not." [1 Timothy 5:13](#)

We may want to...

...learn to be a graphic designer.

...learn to be an accountant.

...learn to be a dog trainer.

...learn to be a barista.

...learn to be a photographer.

There are a lot of things we may want to learn. But none of us want to "learn to be an idler."

We wouldn't sign up for a class to "Learn How to Be an Idler in Thirty Days or Less."

We wouldn't study books on "How to Become the Best Idler You can Be."

Yet we may be unwittingly training ourselves in idleness by our online habits.

The young widows *learned* to be idlers by "going about from house to house."

Are we learning to be idlers by "going about from Facebook page to Facebook page"?

It's a question we may not want to ask, but one we must all take to heart.

What Killed the Cat

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not." [1 Timothy 5:13](#)

The young widows in Timothy's town went about from house to house. Why? Did they want some fresh air? A bite to eat? Were they lonely? Maybe, but what really drove them from house to house was an insatiable curiosity to know about other people.

They wanted to know what was going on in everybody else's lives--the dirt, the juicy secrets, the pains and struggles, the successes and triumphs, the failures and foibles.

Is this what drives us from Facebook page to Facebook page? From Twitter feed to Twitter feed? From celebrity gossip column to headline news? We are curious. We want to know. Who is seeing whom? Who broke up with whom? Who's fighting with whom? Who hit bottom? Who made it big?

Problem is, this curiosity can become a craving. And this craving to know about others can eclipse our desire to know about God.

Has our curiosity about other people's lives become insatiable? Do we just have to know what is going on with all our friends and acquaintances? Do we feel out of touch if we can't have constant access to social media? Do we have more of a desire to read our Facebook feed than God's Word? *Has curiosity become a sinful craving?*

A Social Media Challenge

by Carolyn Mahaney

Last week we [tweeted](#) a social media question: *Has our appetite to know about people eclipsed our appetite to know about God?*

Here's one way to tell: if you had to do without one or the other--God's Word or social media--for two weeks, which would be harder to give up?

If your desire to commune with God is weak and waning, and your desire to stay in touch with others on social media has morphed into a "need," there may be a connection between the two.

So, we'd like to issue a social media challenge, beginning today. **Less for More.**

Less time on Twitter, more time in Scripture. Less time on Facebook, more time in God's Book. Less time on Pinterest, more time in the Bible. Less time stalking people, more time seeking God.

For the next two weeks we challenge you (and ourselves) to:

1. **Read a portion from God's Word every day. (Here are some great [Bible reading plans](#) if you don't have one already.)**
2. **Read 5 pages of J.I. Packer's [Knowing God](#) every day.**
3. **Spend less time on social media in order to make more time for #1 and #2.**

It's up to you to determine the scope of #3. Maybe you need to fast from social media for the entire two weeks. Maybe you resolve to complete #1 and #2 each day before you go online. Or, maybe you need to evaluate when you waste the most time on social media (evening? morning? bus or train ride? children's naps?) and read the Bible and Knowing God during that time instead.

And consider asking someone to keep you accountable. We'll keep you posted on our progress (ironically!) via [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). But we'd rather you complete the challenge than check in with us.

Think of this as a desire realignment. For if you spend more time seeking God in the Scriptures and less time perusing people's feeds and walls, your heart posture will change. And your vision will change too: you'll see more clearly how magnificent God is and forever will be, and, by comparison, just how meaningless social media is. As the song goes:

"Turn your eyes upon

Jesus Look full in his wonderful face

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace."

Less for More

by Carolyn Mahaney

"What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight and contentment than anything else? Knowledge of God...[It] provides at once a foundation, shape and goal for our lives, plus a principle of priorities and a scale of values. Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord.... What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance, and this the Christian has in a way that no other person has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God?" JI Packer, p. 33-34

We love the ideas coming in for our [#LessForMore challenge](#). If you are on a Facebook fast like one of our readers (keep it up!) , here are a few helpful comments that may spark your imagination:

Kristina - From hearing John Piper say he has the rule: No Bible no breakfast. I have adopted: No Bible no Facebook! I haven't been perfect. When I get late and the day disappears I have broken the rule. But I love that it rings in my ear!

Angelle - I'm a sophomore in college and this last year I decided I needed to make a big change with regards to my devotions. In the past I've read in the evenings because I fell asleep too easily in the morning, but I really felt like I needed to be starting my day out with God's Word to help me stay focused throughout the day. This semester I have a new plan: every evening before I go to bed I unplug my laptop, put it in it's case, and put it in a drawer in my dorm. The laptop doesn't come out until I've read a chapter in Luke (the book I'm working through now), prayed, and read Morning & Evening. I've thankful that I have been able to keep this commitment all but two mornings and this is the 5th week of school!

Lindie - challenge accepted! I just downloaded a Bible for my mobile. Everytime before checking facebook i am going to read a chapter.

Rebecca - What a wonderful idea! I will take you up on that challenge. I think for number three I will pick a specific time out of my day (an hour or less) to check e-mail, facebook, and the rest. Instead of going on the computer anytime my heart desires. Thank you for posting this challenge.

Tell us about your #LessforMore challenge and may God give us all grace to spend less time online and more time seeking Him!

"Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord." [Hosea 6:3](#)

Not Only Idlers

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not." [1 Timothy 5:13](#)

"Idle hands are the devil's tools" is a quaint old phrase--literally, it dates back to Chaucer, who got the idea from Scripture. You may have heard it as a child, from a grandparent or some other elderly person; but this bit of wisdom isn't bandied about much these days. When we hear the word "idle" we may think of the minivan in the driveway, but not a person whose hands are in danger of becoming devilish instruments.

That's because we are no longer troubled by idleness. We no longer warn our children of its dangers or confess it to a friend. Our culture cultivates idleness, and so we are reasonably comfortable with it and even

(unwittingly?) encourage it. But idleness is condemned throughout Scripture and so it should be of serious concern to the Christian.

Why? What is the big deal? We know idleness may not be admirable, but isn't it rather harmless? Why did the biblical authors and people throughout the centuries speak so strongly about it, even comparing it to a devil's tool?

We see the answer right here in [1 Timothy 5:13](#). Idleness is serious because it leads to all kinds of serious sins. Two of them are mentioned here: an idle person is in grave danger of becoming a gossip and a busybody.

Idleness is the fertile soil in which gossip and busybody behavior grow like weeds. And nowhere is the soil of idleness more rich than on the Internet. Pondering this fact can help restore a healthy fear of this "forgotten" sin and give us pause before we go online.

The Case of the Vanishing Busybody

by Carolyn Mahaney

Whitney Carpenter is on the [case](#):

"I am suspect that the neighborhood busybody, the beloved stock character of film, television, and literature, is going extinct. That familiar face, leering at us from between parted blinds, has disappeared...Why would the busybody, so comfortable in her housecoat and hot-rollers for the last hundred years, choose this decade to disappear?

The answer? Whitney doesn't think you're going to like it:

If this stock character is vanishing from pop culture it's because the elements that she satirizes — the judgmental attitude, the gossiping, and the obsession with domestic conflicts — do not apply to her demographic in modern society....The busybody isn't gone from our midst; she has merely expanded her ranks so quickly and surreptitiously that we haven't noticed....the busybody is everywhere and everyone.

And how did the busybody become so ubiquitous? The Internet, of course.

The going cliché is that the Internet, and social networking in particular, is making the world a smaller place. I would take that a step further and suggest that social networking is roping our personal worlds — all of our

acquaintances spread across our lifetime and the globe — into one blue-and-white small town. And peering through the blinds at our neighbors and crushes from middle school isn't some old lady. It's me, you, and everyone we've ever met.

Ouch. But she goes on:

The busybody, our patron saint, was ostracized because she was just too interested. Well, we're interested and we aren't likely to stop being interested any time soon

...[E]very time I start a sentence with the phrase "I saw on Facebook..." I remind myself that I'm sporting the verbal-equivalent of a housecoat and hot rollers.

Makes you think twice about starting a sentence that way! Even though this article was written a couple of years ago (and not from a Christian worldview, as far as I can tell), it is a vivid and relevant illustration of [1 Timothy 5:13](#). We'll revisit this verse again, tomorrow.

Minding Our Own Business

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not." [1 Timothy 5:13](#)

Each time we go online, we feel the pull of idleness. We may log on to the Internet with every intention of accomplishing a task, only to get curious about what other people are doing, and so neglect what we should be doing. And before we know it, we're on the slippery slope to becoming a gossip or a busybody.

While we may draw the line at spreading gossip, we may easily get drawn into reading gossip on the Internet. And the effect on our souls is poisonous: *"The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body."* ([Proverbs 18:8](#))

But maybe our idleness inclines us more toward the busybody--that unattractive character we considered yesterday, peering at other people through her computer screen, overly curious about their lives, meddlesome, maybe even quick to criticize or correct.

"If not doing one's own business, one is apt to meddle with his neighbor's business. Idleness is the parent of busybodies." (Jamieson-Faussett-Brown Bible Commentary)

The close relationship between idleness and busybodiness (if I can coin a word) is highlighted again in [2 Thessalonians 3:11](#): *"For we hear that some among you walk in idleness" Paul says, "not busy at work, but busybodies."*

Not busy at work, but busybodies. Is that what Paul would hear about us today? Are we not busy with our own business, but busy with the business of others?

This temptation confronts us every time we go online: to neglect the business God has given us to do today in favor of reading about, and in some cases, meddling in the business of others.

But we can resist busybody behavior by simply doing the work God has called us to do; busying ourselves with our own hearts and not the hearts of others, our own homes and relationships and not the homes and relationships of others, our own work and not another's work.

By avoiding idleness online we can steer clear of the slippery slope that leads to the busybody.

Staying Busy

by Nicole Whitacre

What does it look like to be busy with our own business? We find the answer in the verses immediately preceding [1 Timothy 5:13](#). Instead of meddling, we are to be devoted to every good work. Here's a post that Janelle wrote a on these verses a few years ago:

"Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work."

This verse explains which widows are eligible to receive help and care from the church if they have no other means of support. But its application is for all of us, because it is a description of the life and character of a godly woman. I want you to take a look at the final phrase—“has devoted herself to every good work”—At first glance, it may appear to be a little vague. Kinda like what happens when I can’t come up with a concluding sentence for one of my posts, so I just tack on something nice-sounding but essentially meaningless.

Not the case here! There is nothing vague about this concluding remark. Paul is making a very clear point. In case we got the idea that we could check off one of each of these good works and qualify as a godly woman, Paul raises the stakes considerably. He says the godly woman is devoted to good works. As one commentary describes it, she is “energetically and diligently giving herself” to this stuff. I can imagine this woman constantly looking and listening, ready to serve upon discovery of the slightest need.

Do you remember the t-shirt that was popular a few years back with the slogan that read, “Tennis (or Basketball or Fishing) is Life. Everything else is just details”? Well, here Paul is saying that the godly woman’s outlook is: “Devotion to Good Works is Life. Everything else is just details.”

Bringing up children, showing hospitality, caring for the afflicted—these aren’t things the godly woman does one time, like a community service requirement. Good works are what she is giving her life, energy, time, and heart to. Good works are what she is all about.

But there is one other word that makes this phrase even more powerful. Yep, it’s that little word “every.” “Every” quite simply means “every.” It doesn’t mean “some” or “most,” but every. The godly woman doesn’t limit herself to good works that are easy, or get her the most attention, or are her top favorites. She practices good works of all kinds. And we can safely assume that they aren’t all pleasant.

Not such a vague phrase after all, huh?

I think John Wesley’s well-known quote expands nicely on what Paul is saying here:

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.”

Cause everything else? It's just details.

(You can [download a PDF](#) of our entire "Good Works" series)

How to Use Social Media

by Carolyn Mahaney

"Those who have received the gospel, are to live according to the gospel.... If we are idle, the devil and a corrupt heart will soon find us somewhat to do. The mind of man is a busy thing; if it is not employed in doing good, it will be doing evil. It is an excellent, but rare union, to be active in our own business, yet quiet as to other people's." ~Matthew Henry

As we've seen, idleness and a corrupt heart are a bad combination. They lead to all kinds of dangerous, gospel belying behavior. A better two-some, as Matthew Henry suggests, is to be "active in our own business, yet quiet as to other people's" Busy at work, not busybodies (2 Thess. 3:11). This is the twin-goal we must keep before us when using social media.

How we use social media matters because of the gospel. "Those who have *received* the gospel, are to *live according to* the gospel"--on Twitter, Facebook, and everywhere we go online. We must never forget that we have been cleansed from former sins (2 Pet. 1:9). We must always remember that we have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

We must tweet and message, post and comment, *according to the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Walk to Rest

by Nicole Whitacre

How do we find rest for our restless souls? True rest is not found in an afternoon at the spa, or by curling up in front of the TV, or from an hour of browsing Pinterest or Twitter.

Our Lord shows us the way to rest in Jeremiah 6:16:

*"Thus says the Lord: 'Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and **walk in it**, and find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'" (emphasis mine)*

Derek Kidner comments:

As for the compassionate offer of *rest for your souls*, it is brushed aside-- for as sinners we do not take kindly either to God's diagnosis of our restless state or to his remedy for it. That remedy..., both here and in our Lord's quotation of the last line (Mt. 11:29), is no rest-cure but a redirection: the blessed relief of stepping out along the right way. Jesus interprets this in personal terms of **walking with him** as his working partners ('my yoke upon you') and his pupils ('learn from me'). ~*The Message of Jeremiah*, p. 46, emphasis mine

Relief comes when we take a step of repentance for our laziness or craving of other's approval that leads us to seek satisfaction for our souls online. It comes when we trust in the forgiveness that comes only through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

We find true rest when we fulfill our God-assigned good works, by the grace of God, in a God-honoring manner: bending to the privilege of becoming God's working partner, His student.

So what good and ancient road of obedience do you need to take a step down today?

Walk and experience blessed relief.

The Best Subject of All Our (Online) Conversation

by Carolyn Mahaney

"[I]f you are in company, let your time be spent in that conversation that profiteth: let it not be about your dressing, your plays, your profits, or your worldly concerns, but let it be the wonders of redeeming love. O tell, tell to each other what great things the Lord has done for your souls; declare unto one another how you were delivered from the hands of your common enemy, Satan, and how the Lord has brought your feet from the clay and

has set them upon the rock of ages, the Lord Jesus Christ; there, my brethren, is no slipping. Other conversation, by often repeating, you become fully acquainted with, but of Christ there is always something new to raise your thoughts; you can never want when the love of the Lord Jesus Christ is the subject. So let Jesus be the subject, my brethren, of all your conversation." George Whitfield in [*O Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*](#) p 13¹

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