

I Need Help and You Probably Do Too

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For years I have said there is a massive amount of information available on the internet and some of it is true!

The information we have at our fingertips (literally) is staggering. When my wife and I joined the staff of the USCWM (now Frontier Ventures) almost 35 years ago, we had a much harder time knowing what was happening around the world. Learning about breakthroughs did not happen in seconds. We depended, in part, on global workers coming through our facilities and sharing with us. For example, we had no idea what was happening with the growth of the church in China. When we started to hear it and share it, no one believed it.

How different it is now. Accessing and sharing information for our work and ministry is much easier, but comes with new challenges. Sometimes we believe things that aren't true! There is not only falsehood, but also misleading information—which can be more dangerous. Then, there is deception, which is a problem because we do not realize it is happening. But distraction may be the most destructive by-product of the “internet age” for committed believers—again, because we don't realize it is happening.

I don't spend much time with social media. Don't tell anyone, but I use it to share vision and insights and to connect with our family and local church. Since I am a visual person, I am easily

distracted. As I have gotten older, I have become even more distractible. For instance, I might reach for my phone to check the weather before a bike ride. Then I notice an email that needs a reply—which I had forgotten about because of some other distraction! By now, I've forgotten why I picked up my phone at all. The impulse nature of “always-on information” and a world that is constantly connected socially (at some level) has changed how we work, relate and mobilize.

That last word—mobilize—is why I write about all this in *MF*. We need to understand what is happening and see where tools like smart phones are good and where we need to challenge their negative aspects. How does this impact mobilizing the next generation globally? Here are a few reflections to suggest what we do about it.

- We lose the ability to focus on a single task. While this is different for each generation, many of us older mobilizers wonder if younger “digital natives” will be able to focus on anything but their phones...say, on language learning with real people they don't know?

Just this morning, while traveling, I was reading my Bible on my phone. And, sure enough, just as I was beginning to think more deeply about Paul's talk to the Ephesian elders, I have a notification cover part of my screen. I have found that deep study of the Word takes time and focus, which is harder and harder to fit in. I fear for those who have never tried. I can (and do) turn off Notifications sometimes. My phone is hardly ever in our bedroom. Yet I realize that to “disconnect” can be a

challenge when we feel a pull to keep up on what people are interested in. Social media can be a great way to network and connect people in new ways.

- We can shape our image so we look “right” to our friends or the world. But, in the process, do we deceive ourselves about ourselves—who we are, what we do? Are we thinking about how we come across and doing things specifically to look good (however we define that) to others? This could also drive some to look more “spiritual” as well as “cool.” Yet either way, motivations need to be considered carefully. Of course, this happens in real face-to-face life also!

- Time for social media seems unlimited. We all know people who post all the time. It may be helpful for them to think through and process things. Actually connecting via social media or in person can be an effective tool for ministry. But it must be controlled like any area of our lives.

We must try and focus our use of these tools and think through our patterns prayerfully. We know we need to filter information, work at ignoring innocent distractions and avoid certain ungodly or sinful things.

Most of the valuable things in a Godward life are hard and require attention. There is a massive amount of information available to us, but the good in it may be distracting us from the best. I strongly encourage you to be mindful—and pray—whenever you pick up your phone.

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