

Why Our Attention Needs Stewardship

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Decades ago, Nobel Prize–winning economist Herbert A. Simon famously observed that “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.” Now, more than ever, we’re experiencing the poverty of such wealth.

We live in a highly distracting world where our attention is an acutely targeted commodity, and the temptation for diversion lurks closer than ever before—in our back pockets, in our hands, strapped to our wrists. In addition, we have an ever-increasing buffet of media outlets, commentators of every kind, and social networks with finely tuned algorithms poised to serve up both a timely and an endless feed for any appetite.

At the same time, there’s a common undercurrent of discomfort about the pull we feel toward all that our technology-laden culture offers and the minutes and moments it eagerly consumes. According to [a recent study](#), as many as 47 percent of Americans consider themselves addicted to their phones. Even if we’re not addicted, most of us can admit to cognitive dissonance in reconciling the benefits technology provides with the resources, such as time and attention, it consumes.

So how can we navigate this tension wisely? Though the struggle may feel new, the solution is not. We are called to stewardship.

Attention Is a Resource

When we consider [stewardship as followers of Christ](#), we think of stewarding our resources like time, talents, and [money](#). But we don’t tend to think of our attention as a resource.

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In 1997, theoretical physicist Michael Goldhaber wrote about [the economics of attention](#) and the impending shift from a material-based to an attention-based economy. In response, economists and marketers began to home in on the immense value of limited attention in the marketplace. These scholars anticipated the very tension we now experience. Our attention is indeed a resource—an increasingly limited one, with hardly enough to go around. Stewardship in this area is vital.

Using screen-time-tracking apps, turning off notifications, and disconnecting streaming services may be helpful tools of stewardship, but we aren’t limited to solely reactive measures. We should also consider how to proactively steward our attention.

Setting Our Focus

Margie Warrell, a board member for the Forbes School of Business and Technology, suggests a unique solution in her [article on combating distraction](#): “More often our productivity levels . . . are impacted less by the distractions themselves, and more by the fact that we have simply not been clear about what we really want to focus our attention on.” Her insights may explain why our attempts at defeating distraction often fail. We spin our wheels in a tug-of-war with our distractions rather than being clear about what we should focus our attention on instead.

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Perhaps Warrell’s words ring true because they’re reminiscent of Paul’s words in [Colossians 3:1–2](#). *Set your mind. Seek the things above.* Paul tells the Colossians (and us) exactly [what to focus on](#).

David models this setting and seeking in [Psalm 119](#). He asks the Lord to teach him and help him understand God’s precepts that he might learn them, meditate on them, fix his eyes on them, store them, and keep them. His affection for God’s Word is his anchor of faithfulness in the past and present, and his inheritance for the future. David is very clear about what he wants to pay attention to—and he rightly understands who can help him.

Help for Struggling Stewards

We all know that wanting to steward our attention and doing it are different things. Thankfully, in [John 14](#), Jesus promises us a Helper, the Holy Spirit. His presence and power are life-changing help for believers desperate to become faithful stewards, paying attention in a distracting world. We read in Galatians that some of the fruit of the Spirit’s active work in us is peace and self-control. And as Peter explains, God’s “divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” ([2 Pet. 1:3](#)). God promises to provide everything we need to faithfully engage this struggle.

We can navigate a noisy world with peace rather than guilt. We can understand the limited nature of our attention and choose to focus it, set it, and steward it wisely. We can cling to God’s Word as David did, and we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us employ the beauty of our very design to faithfully choose obedience. *Do our minutes scrolling online and waiting in line bring glory to you, God? How can we honor you with our attention?* Setting our minds and seeking the help of the Spirit is a wise place to begin.