

## LIFE GROUP LESSON

### Message: “Keeping Our Focus in a Distracted World”

Passages: Luke 10:38-42

#### Message Outline:

How can we be fully present in a world full of distractions?

1. Recognise the Consequences of Distractions (v38-42a).
  - a) Distraction Divides My Attention
  - b) Distraction Clouds My Judgment
2. Choose to Focus on Things of Higher Value (v42b).

#### Discussion for Point 1: Recognize the Consequences of Distractions (Luke 10:38-42a).

- a) Distraction Divides My Attention
- b) Distraction Clouds My Judgment

- Sometimes we can be “physically here but yet not fully present.” Do you agree with this? Explain your answer. What are some of the things that tends to be able to easily distract you? Why do you think they have that ability to do so?
- How do you feel about people who seem to be distracted when they relate with you? In the same way, how do you think people would feel when you behave like that with them? The preacher mentioned that when we are able to give attention to people, it communicates that we value them. Do you agree with this? Give reasons for your answer. Who are some of the people in your life that you need to learn to give more attention to? Explain your answer. In what ways do you think you need to adjust your daily practices in order to give attention to people, especially in your relationships?

#### Discussion for Point 2: Choose to Focus on Things of Higher Value (Luke 10:42b).

- Do you agree that distractions (even if they are good things) can cause us to drift away from what is best for us? Give reasons for your answer. What are some of the better things you have missed out on in your life because you were distracted with the many other things and activities in your life? What can happen if we consistently allow “good things” to crowd out what God deems as the “best thing” for us?
- The preacher mentioned that the evil one cannot succeed in destroying us, but he can easily succeed in distracting us. Do you agree with this assertion? Explain your answer. Read Psalm 27:4-5. According to the Psalmist, what should be regarded as the best thing in life? Why do you think the Psalmist regards the Presence of God as the best thing in life? What distractions do you face that can at times draw you away from God’s Presence? In what way do you need to make adjustments in your life to deal with these distractions?

*“One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.”*  
~ Psalm 27:4-5

## **Appendix A (For Personal Reflection)**

### **New Habits for High-Tech Hearts**

#### *Restore Space to Your Spiritual Life by Silencing Your Cell Phone*

By Ruth Barton, NavPress

(Adapted from Discipleship Journal, <http://www.navpress.com/magazines/archives/article.aspx?id=21022>)

After years of trying to manage a cell phone, multiple land lines, and several voice-mail and email accounts, I finally realized the profound effect communication technology was having on my life.

My “aha” moment came while I was sitting on a flight from San Diego to Chicago. I had just completed a speaking engagement lasting several days; I was more than ready to go home. As we prepared for takeoff, a man near me shouted into his cell phone, obviously trying to nail down one last business transaction before the flight. Irritated, I could hardly wait for the flight attendant to tell us to turn off our cell phones and pagers. After the noise and activity of the last several days, I yearned for the four hours of enforced silence ahead.

In that moment, I saw what my world had been reduced to: The only place of refuge from the overstimulation of phone calls and email messages was in an airplane 30,000 feet above the earth.

### **Reflections and Regrets**

During the flight, I was too tired to do anything but sit. My thoughts wandered into a reflection on how communication technology had taken over my life. I was surprised to discover a deep sadness underlying my exhaustion. I recalled a recent lunch with a close friend. She had been relating something of personal significance when my cell phone rang. For whatever reason, I answered it. The content of the phone call was inconsequential, but it disrupted our conversation. We never quite reached the level of intimacy we had before the interruption.

Another time I set aside a day to spend in solitude with God, but I couldn't bring myself to turn off my cell phone for the *whole* day. Although I longed to give my complete attention to God, I kept wondering what calls I was missing. After lunch, I gave in and checked my messages. I was not able to experience true silence for the rest of the day.

Wading deeper into my sadness, I realized that my compulsion to check my email as soon as I woke up or “one more time” before I went to bed was imperceptibly robbing me of quiet mornings with God and evenings of rest. And even when I took walks or rode my bike—favorite pastimes of mine—I often carried a cell phone, leaving myself open to intrusions.

### **Exhausted by Convenience**

A soul-numbing exhaustion sets in when we are too accessible too much of the time. We experience profound sadness when our quality of life slips away as a result of too much convenience. Activities that once replenished our bodies and souls—such as driving, going for a walk, having lunch with a friend—soon fill with interruption and multitasking. What feels like “being available” is really a boundary-less existence that fails to protect the moments of rest and meaningful interaction with God and others that are most precious to us.

While communication technology promises that we will be more connected to others—we can “reach out and touch” them any time we want—it gradually produces a deeper kind of fragmentation. Our human relationships are reduced to snippets of interrupted, disembodied phone conversations and hurried email messages.

Other areas of our lives suffer as well. We feel disconnected from God because we are rarely able to give Him our full attention. Thoughtful reflection is constantly sabotaged by cell phones, pagers, and email messages. The quality of our work declines because we are rarely able to devote our time and energy to a single task. We are left with bits and pieces of everything rather than experiencing the full substance of anything. Yet many of us sustain such losses without even being aware of what we are losing.

## The Heart of the Matter

What is behind our easy surrender to availability addiction? For me, the choice to leave my cell phone or pager on often indicates that I’m living from a divided heart. I am not content to be in one place at a time, with one person or group of people at a time, doing one thing at a time. *Perhaps*, a small voice whispers inside me, *something more important is going on somewhere else. Perhaps someone more important than the person I am with is trying to reach me.* I cannot decide what is most important in the moment and be fully and unequivocally available for that. And so I am tossed to and fro by competing priorities. My heart—that place from which I make decisions that shape my life—is not settled. By leaving myself open to the intrusion of a cell phone or pager, I fail to keep my heart with all diligence so that it becomes a wellspring of life for myself and others ([Prov. 4:23](#)).

Of course, there are times when I do need to be available in case of an emergency, but these do not occur as often as I think. A subtle pride sometimes lures me to believe that the world cannot go on without my direct involvement while I am at lunch with a friend, spending time with my family, or giving God my undivided attention. Other times, my unwillingness to limit myself to one thing at a time, and thus honor that one thing, indicates that I do not trust God to accomplish what concerns me in the broader context of my life while I attend fully to the people or tasks at hand. I cannot seek first what is most important in the present moment because I do not trust that everything else will be added in God’s way and in God’s time.

At times I also use the constant accessibility afforded by technology to avoid acknowledging painful areas in my life. In the absence of words, activity, and constant conversation, I often encounter profound loneliness or areas of confusion and deep questioning. Although these are a natural part of human experience, they are also a very real part of my personal experience. Continually moving from one phone conversation to the next or constantly checking my email keeps me from having to deal with or grieve over such disconcerting emotions. Staying connected to what’s going on “out there” keeps me disconnected from what’s going on in my soul.

## Fresh Disciplines for New Challenges

As I listened to my longings and frustrations on the airplane that day, I realized I needed a whole new set of spiritual disciplines to help me put technology in its proper place in my life. Cell phones and other communication devices were not the problem; it was how I used them that determined whether they brought good or distraction to my life. By paying attention to the times of day and aspects of life I desired to protect from interruption, I developed some technology-related spiritual disciplines. Practicing these disciplines has helped me create space for God, others, and myself in what had become a cluttered existence.

**In the morning.** Over the years, I had slipped into the habit of turning on my cell phone as soon as I woke up and checking my email before I even had my first cup of coffee. This habit was gradually crowding out moments I once spent in silence, prayer, or just sitting in God’s presence. Since I work primarily from home, I was often full-bore into the tasks of the day before I was even fully awake.

For me, early morning is a special time. I am in a more rested and undefended state than at any other time of the day. The new day stretches out unspoiled and full of potential. If I am getting enough sleep, I feel quietly alert, receptive, even creatively energized. How I spend these first moments can set the tone of the whole day. And depending on the demands of my life, early morning might be the only time I have all day for listening to God in silence.

To preserve this time of quiet preparation, I now wait until 9:00 to turn on my cell phone or check my email. Then, when I engage with the world, including the world of technology, I am less frenetic and more grounded in God. When I am tempted to abandon this practice, I remind myself of my deeper desires by asking, *How do I want to begin this day—really? Do I want to start with distraction and interruption or with quiet and listening?*

**In the evening.** Having constant access to cell phones and other communication technology makes it more difficult for me to establish clear boundaries between work and personal life. Because I can check my email from almost anywhere and often wear my cell phone like a fashion accessory, I'm tempted to believe that if I keep doing one more thing, I will eventually finish my tasks. On one level, this may be true—I may check all the items off my to-do list. On another level (my need for rest, leisure, and relationships), I just get further and further behind.

To prevent my work from bleeding into every nook and cranny of my life, I have established a routine for transitioning from the workday into the evening hours. I intentionally turn off my computer and other work-related technology as soon as I am done working. As I unplug from these devices, I symbolically release the day's work to God in order to receive fully the gifts of eventide: a shared meal, relationships with family and friends, leisure, and rest. I join God in His pattern of working and resting and agree with Him that the work of this day is enough and it is good (see Genesis 1).

**On the Sabbath.** God set aside one day a week for us to spend in rest, worship, and delight because He understood our human need to be refreshed. The intrusion of communication technology into every area of life makes the idea of a Sabbath very compelling, yet often just out of reach. Our gadgets make it possible to work from almost anywhere, and the temptation to run hard seven days a week is almost more than we can resist.

To counter this tendency, I've become more thoughtful about how I use technology on the Sabbath. On this day, I often turn off my cell phone and other technological devices that keep me from engaging fully with God and the people I am around. I intentionally make the Sabbath a day to be with friends and loved ones, sharing elements of life that cannot be experienced through cell phones or email, such as enjoying warm fellowship over a meal in our homes.

**In solitude and silence.** Amid the pace, noise, and convenience of communication technology, it is challenging to find time for solitude and silence. And yet, we are desperate for ways to open ourselves to God, who comes in silence, not in noise. We are starved for mystery, to come reverently before God. We long for intimacy, to feel and know Him in the cells of our beings. We hunger for rest, to experience God beyond what we think we can do for Him. We desire quiet, complete stillness in which to listen for the presence of God. These are the gifts that technology cannot give; these gifts require solitude and silence.

Because I am hurried and distracted so much of the time, I need extended times of solitude to slow my body, mind, and soul enough so that I can recognize and respond to God's voice. It takes one day of solitude a month, completely unplugged, for me to get quiet enough to hear God and allow Him to touch the deeper places of my being. These days are never convenient, and they render me inaccessible to the people in my life. However, on these days I am completely accessible to God, which in the end benefits everyone around me.

**With others.** Being thoughtful about when and how I use my cell phone in my relationships with others is more than mere courtesy. I express respect and attention when I turn off my cell phone during meetings with colleagues, when I am with friends, while I drive my children to a ball game or an appointment, and as I listen to a speaker. I can also honor others by saving difficult or tender conversations for face-to-face encounters where we can make eye contact, see each other's laughter or tears, reach out with a hug, or sit in silence when conversation becomes too difficult for words.

I am not averse to communication technology; I still rely on a cell phone, an office phone, a home phone, and an email account. Although I enjoy the convenience these provide, I am increasingly aware of deeper longings for things they cannot give—quiet, uninterrupted moments in which to listen to God and explore the dynamics of my soul, the substance and beauty of other people's physical presence, the depth of communication we share when we look into others' eyes, hear their tone of voice, and observe their body language.

By practicing a more thoughtful approach to communication technology, I can order my life around what matters most. My attempts to change how I allow technology to impact my life are somewhat fledgling, but they give me hope. Instead of being carried along by my compulsions or living at the mercy of phone calls and other interruptions, I have begun to reclaim space for my soul, for the people I love, and for God.