

Your Soul and the Digital Landscape

Financial Announcement

Hey Friends – every year, on the first Sunday of December, we give a financial update as people consider their biggest giving of the year. Now for those who are new to church budgets, let me give you a picture of an annual church budget. It looks like this: And this is why we call our budgetary map “the hockey stick.” Basically, there are minor variations throughout the year, but the big bump is in December, roughly double the need of a normal month. This makes sense because many of our givers do a special December gift or do all of their giving in December – because they are in sales or own a business or have strategic tax considerations. And this is critical to make the goal of being a financially healthy church. Our good news is that as of December 1, we are spot on for our budget. Not high, not low. Every dollar matters and no real overage.

The sobering reality is that in order to make it to finish the year in the black, we still need 1.15 million this month. Now, if you are new, CCC is a debt-free church, meaning all of your giving goes to ministry and none to interest. You can have confidence in both the integrity and focus of our teams that spend your money for God’s purposes.

This year, we sensed God leading us to add a challenge. Because there are three things we’d love to do next year that are not in our budget UNLESS we go over this year. So my challenge to you is to pray about giving extra generous this year to help us get those things on our list. The first one is sports fields. Did you know that we have 300 kids here on Saturdays in the spring for our outreach sports league – upward soccer? We bring neighbors, kids, and share the gospel every week on the field. Yes! And our only limit to growing the ministry is space. So we are reallocating our baseball field to be soccer fields – and a number of things need to be done to make it workable, then optimal. We need to turn dirt into grass, set up a portapotty city, and in our best scenario – add lights. This would double our potential to reach kids – to 600 or more. PLUS, God may be opening a door for us to have an outreach flag football league in the fall, expanding our potential even further. Adding this to our current volleyball courts, running trail and possibly even pickle ball – and we will be able to develop a MAJOR sports outreach at CCC.

I don’t think it is an accident that we are in the middle of the city with amazing fields and thriving kids ministry. We’d love to expand.

The other two have to do with some building and tech infrastructure, and an opportunity to bless Camp Rivercrest with some new housing that will allow 28 more kids per week to attend camp – that’s 280 per summer. So sports, tech and camp rivercrest. All will be possible if our year end giving is on high, so let’s be outrageously generous so that we can be on mission to reach one more!

Pray

The digital landscape

I remember hearing Steve Jobs pitching his iPhone concept back in 2006. He said “it will be the perfect tool to manage your digital world.” The interviewer said what I was thinking “I don’t HAVE a digital world.” And Jobs replied “oh, you will...” And he was right. In fact, the digital world of today has deeply integrated with our relational world, our educational world, and our entertainment world.

The computer in your pocket is so powerful and the power is ramping up fast. In fact, if you have an older version, like mine... your phone can make calculations more than 100,000 times faster than the Apollo 11 spacecraft that took men to the moon. And, it has 1,000,000 x the memory!

It is no wonder that this device has dramatically changed our culture.

In fact, it has not only changed our culture, our education, our livelihoods and relationships, it has changed our brains. And we should be aware of the ways that we are different – physiologically for sure, but also mentally... and even spiritually as a result. Today, I am going to zoom in on two things that may be problematic from our use of screens.

**Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Romans 12:2**

Alex introduced this as our key verse for the series last week. And I want to read it out loud together. Can you join me?

Do not be conformed... What conforms us is that which we pay attention to. The old saying is kinda true “you are what you eat.” I think it is more accurate to say “you become what you love.” Or “you conform to what you pay attention to.” That we watch, that we listen to, that we run toward. You are more likely to think about, dwell on, desire, geek out on, and aspire to whatever you are watching.

If you were to look at my electronic world and ask “what does Mark geek out on?” You would find a lot of Bible stuff for sure, but also college football, golf and CrossFit videos, Hoka Shoes, Men’s Warehouse, world news, my Son’s YouTube channel, and extreme sports reels. Let me ask you as a starting question... if your electronic world was evaluated, what might people find? Where is your attention? To whom are you gifting the stunning gift of your attention? What is conforming you to the pattern of this world?

And it is not just the use of cell phone that can be problematic – it is all screens. So your phone may be simple, but I want you to translate to the ‘big three’ if you are clean on the phone side of things. The big three are TV, Laptop, and phone. And I’ll just let the Spirit talk to you about which might be most convicting.

An attention economy

But know in the background that what happens in your living room is just the tip of the iceberg. Behind the scenes is a massive financially driven mega economy that is behind your phone usage. This was exposed most poignantly a couple of years ago in the documentary, The Social Dilemma. In it, former executives from Google, Facebook, Amazon and more expose the financial intent of these amazing and massive corporations.

It is linked on our [resource page](#), along with a dozen other follow up resources. Alex is doing seminars for parents, there are some youtube videos. It is really quite helpful.

But you might protest: “I am not spending any money on products. Google, Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok – these are all free!”

Whenever you are getting something for free, the interest of the company is not selling THEIR product. It is selling YOUR attention. • “If you are not paying for the product, you are the product.” – [Tristan Harris, former Google Executive](#)

They become experts at getting you to scroll one more flick of the finger. One more click on a like button. One more check to see how many likes YOU have. One more check on the game score. One more read of an article. And everytime you do, an ad pops up worth one more penny, one more penny, one more penny. Micro changes in your behavior result in the wealthiest companies ever to hit planet earth.

Attention and God...

Let me try a new phrase on you today. [Attention is the path to worship.](#) Talk about this when you get home. Because I am increasingly convinced that you pay attention to the things you value most and value the things you pay attention to. That is what worship is. It is ascribing worth to something by what you think, say and do. It is “worthship”. By the way you expend your resources, you are showing something is very valuable to you.

And one of your most valuable resources is: attention. What are you gazing upon? What are you looking at? What are you internalizing? What are you obeying? What are you preparing for? All of these require attention.

Romans 8:5-6 [Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.](#)

What is your mind set on? Whatever you are paying attention to. So if you binge and entire series of the office, your mind is set there. If you can't wait for the latest Mr. Beast video, your mind is set there. If you watch your favorite news channel all day, your mind is set there. And whatever you set your mind on will affect your will, your priorities, your finances, your family. And Paul warns of this progression – set your mind on the flesh and you will live according to it. Live according to it and you are headed toward death – spiritual and permanent. BUT, put your focus on the Spirit and you will head toward life and peace.

Now you may think I am exaggerating here. But there is a high correlation between anxiety and use of technology.

According to [Anxiety.org](#), there have been 23 independent and peer reviewed articles on the correlation between smartphone use and anxiety. The researchers found that smartphone use was in fact associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as increased experience of stress. The more participants used their smartphones, the more likely they were to experience symptoms associated with these disorders and report being stressed.

And this is not surprising. Cell phone use gives you quick hits of getting likes or seeing into someone else's life. But it is also a comparison trap. Where we used to compare ourselves to our neighbors and try to keep up with the Joneses, now we have a window into everyone's life. It is as if we are keeping up with the Flores', the Ryba's, and the Kim's. As well as a bunch of strangers. A sure formula for anxiety.

Plus, the phone can keep us hoping and disappointed. And it can keep us up late at night – which drives bad choices and feeling horrible in the morning. God does not want this for you.

Isaiah 48:18.

If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea.

You see, putting our attention on God is peace bringing. He knows us and knows what we were created for. In him, we are loved and wanted and secure and peace-filled. He wants us to pray to him because he is the solution to anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. He wants this FOR you!

Distraction

Here is the number one barrier that I hear from people about their meeting with God. Distraction.

I can't concentrate on God. I can't read/memorize scripture. I can't focus, even when I have the time set aside. I sit down and my mind totally wanders. OR I sit down and start thinking about things that really bother me and I'd prefer to avoid. OR, I sit down with good intentions, but out of habit, just pick up my phone and start scrolling.

But in culture, we have a Bigger problem: I can't focus at all. I can't be alone. I can't stand the silence. Now, this is not totally new. I remember back in 1987 – way before internet or cell phones – I went to a leadership camp for four weeks. And every Sunday, we had four hours carved out for a "Retreat of Silence". Four hours with God. And I remember thinking "Four hours with just a Bible and God? What would I do? But the time slipped away and by the end of the four weeks, it was my favorite part of camp.

Computers and phones have accelerated this phenomena. The phone not only serves you, but it demands your attention with it's dings and buzzes. You have notifications for text messages, notifications for Instagram, news stories, sports scores, weather alerts and more! **Did you know that the average person picks up their cell phone 216 times per day? Source: Tecmark.** That's once every six waking minutes. And they tap, touch or swipe 2600 times! **The average daily cell phone usage is 3 hours and 16 minutes and 48% of people panic if their battery goes below 20%.** Source: Reviews.org

Brains rewired

This constant usage has rewired our brains in two ways. First, we create deep neuro pathways around the dopamine rush that comes from cell phone use. Now Dopamine is a pleasure drug in our brains. It is associated with food and exercise and sex and relationships and sharing about your life and accomplishment. You get a rush every time these things happen and it keeps us doing critical things like eating, exercise, and making babies.

Interestingly, you also get a dopamine rush when you get a notification – hoping that someone important is reaching out to you or some big news is hitting the headlines. And you get a dopamine rush when you post a picture of yourself that you like. And you get a dopamine rush when you get likes... and if you get a hundred likes, then wow! We become addicted to the approval, the love, the attention and the novelty. And it all becomes associated with picking up the phone. And those neuro pathways run deep!

According to the book *Distraction*, our brains have become rewired from screens as well. Back in the good old days, we read books left to right, top to bottom. This created strong logical pathways and programmed us for sustained arguments. Books last hundreds of pages and we were able to follow that in a deep way. Now, websites are programmed to get us to click on the next spot... read an article for two paragraphs, then click on the next thing, and the next. Your eyes scan a page for the most relevant or exciting spot and click away. The result? Attention spans are much shorter. Reading a book is almost a lost art in the next generation. And truth claims are not developed along thoughtful sustained arguments, but based on impressions, impulses, slogans and posts under 140 characters in length.

I hope you see the problem here. If you as a follower of Jesus say that “God is my number one most important thing in life” and yet, you cannot meet with him for two key reasons. 1) your mind is just programmed to be spastic based on phone usage and 2) You spend so much time scrolling, gaming and researching that there is no time left for God. Then you have a double problem!

If tech controls you:

- Huge increase in depression and anxiety among teenagers that began around 2011-2013
- US hospital admissions for self harm 2010-2018 increased 62% for older teen girls and 189% for younger teen girls. (Source: CDC) These years are significant because they are the first generation to have multiple years of cell phone usage in middle school
- Suicide rates are similar - +70% for older teen girls, + 151% for girls age 10-14 (Source: CDC)
- More anxious, more fragile, more depressed, less comfortable with risks, drivers license is down, the number who have been on a date is down

A problem:

The problem with technology is not the tech itself. I love instant answers. I love knowing the weather, updating on my bank account, learning to fix my car on youtube, and I just signed on to Be reel. So I am not getting rid of my phone soon. But we all need to ask – have I crossed the line? Am I unhealthy? Has this become an idol? Am I so distracted that I can't focus on God? Let's take a quiz. And FYI, I failed this quiz, so I have some work to do. Keep score...

Danger signs- keep score and see if you get above 6... YES

- Do you check your cell phone before you go to the bathroom in the morning or while in the bathroom?
- Do you use your phone on the toilet?
- Do you tell your spouse or kids to 'hold on' when they want to talk to you because whatever is on the phone is more important?
- Do you spend more time on your favorite habit (social media, gaming, youtube watching) or time with the LORD?

- Do you ever use your phone while driving? (not counting maps or music)
- Do your tech habits disengage you from the needs of neighbors right in front of me?
- Do I have a hard time focusing when I meet with God? Do I pick up my phone during my times with God? At church?
- Do my phone habits expose a need to be seen and liked?
- In a given day are you more likely to say Hey Siri than Hey God...?
- Do you feel uneasy if you leave your phone at home?
- Do you look at your phone while on a date?
- Do you have your phone out at the dinner table?
- I use my phone even when the TV is on.
- When I said “the average person picks up their phone 216 times a day – did you think “oh, that’s low...”
- NO
- Do my tech habits build the glory of Jesus, my church and Christians around me?
- Have you gone 24 hours this year without your device?

If your answers were yes, then I have a great verse for you from Colossians 3

Colossians 3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Set your hearts. Set your minds. On things above. Your phone is the definition of an earthly thing. And when your attention is down instead of up, you are being conformed into the image of this world, not the image of Christ. YOU NEED to set your mind on things above in order to experience the peace and love and joy of Jesus. Otherwise, we will be like the rest of America – stressed, anxious, suicidal, and depressed.

Here are some super practical things you can do beginning today.

- 1) **Awareness** – move from unaware of how the world is manipulating you to aware. This message is a good step. So would the Netflix documentary – The Social Dilemma
- 2) **Settings – Notifications** – Take ten minutes and turn off every notification on your phone. Then go back and turn on the ones that you really want to interrupt your day. For me, texts from my family, airline notices for flights... and that’s about all. You can also bundle your notifications to come in groups. I do twice a day at 6am and 6pm. All my news, messages, sports, and Bible stuff comes then. And the rest just stay off. This has saved me hours a day. And kept me focused.
- 3) **Settings – Focus** – This mode can help you create times of day that you are undisturbed. You select your preferences.
- 4) **Fasting** – Choose one day a week to turn off. For me, my biggest electronic addiction is email. So I just unplug every Saturday from email. It helps me rest and resets my brain toward God and not the busyness of success.
- 5) If you have teens, give your phone a **bed time**. If I had a parenting do-over, this is something I would institute. Pick a time – say 9pm – that phones go to bed. Store them in a room in the house where you do not sleep. Why? Many of the most dangerous things happen at night.

Stalkers, pornography, sleep deprivation. You can buy alarm clocks for \$10 if that is your concern.

- 6) Set your phone to notify you about truly **important things**. Set up a Bible App to pop on when it is time to be with God. Set reminders to pray for people.

Here is the bottom line – you be in control of your technology or your technology will control you. It is our dream at CCC that every person, every week might have one small thing that changes the trajectory of their life by one degree. Then over the course of years, your life is wrapped around God and set on an utterly different course. Set your hearts on things above and set your minds on things above.

Brain Science around –

- There are only two industries that call their customers ‘users’ – Illegal Drugs and software
- NOW.Northrupgunman.com -this is your brain on Instagram
- About 12% are said to have Internet Addiction Disorder – an addiction to the internet
 - Academic performance is deeply impacted
 - Sleep Deprivation
 - Fear of how others will perceive them

- Video gamers – 2+ hours daily – lower GPAs than non gamers source: Sunshine Behavioral health.
- One interruption at work = 20 minutes to get back in the zone...

Dr. Marie Belen

- More than 90 minutes per day increases risk of suicide by 71% in teen girls.
- Daily screen use = 96% among preschoolers (2001, it was 39%)

Instead of putting technology ON the altar, we have made it into an altar.

Worship

- **Duet 28:13** The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you **pay attention** to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom.
- ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2 – key verse of the series
- Matthew 22:37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’
- Get wisdom, get understanding;
do not forget my words or turn away from them.
⁶ Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you;
love her, and she will watch over you.
⁷ The beginning of wisdom is this: Get^[a] wisdom.
Though it cost all you have,^[b] get understanding.
⁸ Cherish her, and she will exalt you;
embrace her, and she will honor you.
⁹ She will give you a garland to grace your head
and present you with a glorious crown.”
- Isaiah 44 – Idols and those who make them
 - They know nothing, they understand nothing;
their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see,
and their minds closed so they cannot understand.
¹⁹ No one stops to think,
no one has the knowledge or understanding to say,
“Half of it I used for fuel;
I even baked bread over its coals,
I roasted meat and I ate.
Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left?
Shall I bow down to a block of wood?”

²⁰ Such a person feeds on ashes; a deluded heart misleads him;
he cannot save himself, or say,
“Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?”

- Any idol is anything that is a cheap substitute for God
- An idol is anything you bow down to
- The phone, the laptop and the TV -

Exodus 23:32-33.

“Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.”

God's commandment to Israel out of Egypt had in mind a similar paradigm to what most social media platforms consider today—we worship whatever commands our attention.

Deuteronomy 4:15-31. Verse 19 below...

“And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars—all the heavenly array—do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.”

Deuteronomy 11:16; 18-21.

“Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. . . . Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.”

On the topic of “focus,” these commands encourage Israel to make their focus on God inescapable in their lives.

Psalms 7:9.

Bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure—you, the righteous God who probes minds and hearts.

Perhaps a good prayer for the one struggling to focus on God.

Psalms 26:2-3.

Test me, Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness.

Psalm 119:3-40.

Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. Fulfill your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared. Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good. How I long for your precepts! In your righteousness preserve my life.

This chunk of Psalm 119 is a great prayer for those desiring to focus on God.

Proverbs 1:20-27. Wisdom's Rebuke

Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square; on top of the wall[d] she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech: "How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings. But since you refuse to listen when I call and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand, since you disregard all my advice and do not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you; I will mock when calamity overtakes you—when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

Ecclesiastes 1:13; 17-18.

I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! . . . Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

Information overload, the thief of our focus

Ecclesiastes 2:22-23.

What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 7:21-22.

Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you—for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17.

When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night— then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.

Isaiah 26:3-4.

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.

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You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal.

Isaiah 42:19-20; 23.

“Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one in covenant with me, blind like the servant of the Lord? You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen.” . . . Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come?

See? Even ancient Israel struggled to focus on God.

The Social Dilemma Notes:

“Nothing vast enters the life of mortals without a curse.” - Sophocles

Former employees of Facebook, Twitter, Google, Pinterest, Palm

YOU ARE the product. It is an attention economy where the value is your attention

- Attention is worship. (find verses)
 - Facebook, Snapshot, Twitter, Insta, YouTube, tiktok, google, pinterest, reddit, linkedin... all of these perform an amazing service for no monthly fee. How do they keep their gargantuan businesses alive? By getting you to pay attention...

- The internet allows us to make amazing predictions about a person's interest and behavior. They know based on your searches who you are and what you are likely to do, buy and be interested in.
 - My feed- middle aged white male
 - Pastor's conferences, Home Depot, Tour Edge Golf, Men's Wearhouse, Fighting Illini Sports, Israel News,
- They know when you are lonely, depressed, looking at porn, looking at ex boyfriend's feed, fantasizing about a vacation at the beach
- It is the gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your behavior that is the product.
 - Me and men's wearhouse example
 - A 1% change can mean a ton of money
 - Internet companies are the richest companies in the history of the world.
 - It is not your data being sold, but the models that predict our actions and behaviors
 - Social Dilemma 17:30
- We can get more people from one party to vote during midterm elections by the kinds of ads we put into their profiles. We may not change their view, but we can influence their behavior.
- Tristan – if something is a tool, it is waiting to be used... If something is not a tool, it is waiting, demanding things from you. It is seducing and manipulating you... that is what has changed.
- For kids, it is not just an addiction to a technology.
 - It is the playground. It is the place they connect.
 - For students, it is their relational world.
- Silicon Valley schools... technology free