

# CHRISTIAN HEADS, HEARTS, AND HANDS

ARTICLES TO FORM US AS FOLLOWERS OF “THE WAY”

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## **A Digital Detox Won't Work Unless You Ask Yourself This Question**

Breaking free from your phone addiction starts with a simple thought experiment

by Alexandra Hearth

There's an app called Mute, which lets you set up challenges with your friends to see who can stay off their phone the longest. Another one called Moment offers “device addiction coaching” to help you pick up your phone less throughout the day. For \$349, you can buy a Palm, a basic, credit card-sized phone designed to keep you from spending so much time on your big, distracting one (“Slip it into your yoga pants,” the website advertises). There are three-step programs, “offline” B&Bs, and even AA-like support groups all aiming to help you disconnect from your digital life. According to Google Trends, searches for “digital detox” have increased by 42% in the past year alone.

Clearly, we have a big appetite for a solution to this modern-day problem. And maybe some of these tools and services can help. But things like booking a phone-free weekend getaway or making our phones very tiny are Band-Aid fixes. For a more sustainable solution, we should ask ourselves this question: If we didn't have our phones to stare at, what would we want to be doing instead?

A big part of the reason we find ourselves spending so much time on our phones is that we don't have a clear idea of what else we should be doing with our time. Rather than finding ways to block ourselves out of our devices for a few hours each day, maybe we need to stop and really think about what we have to gain from being less attached to them.

When I was on vacation in Italy, my phone got stolen. For about 24 hours, I was emotional. I felt detached from people I “connect” with daily, and lonely as a result. After this period had passed, though, I felt strangely relaxed. Sure, being surrounded by the country's natural beauty played a part in that, but for the first time in a long while, I was mentally in the place I was in physically.

I was looking at the view with my own eyes rather than through my Instagram stories. Thoughts about whether people were watching my “content,” or whether this one guy was going to text me, or whether that work project was moving forward, all faded because, for the time being, I had no way of knowing. I wanted to live more like this, every day.

I recently listened to writer Zadie Smith on the *Touré Show*, and she made a simple case for opting out of social media apps altogether: “I'm 42. I don't have that much longer to live. I don't want to spend 20% of that time looking at pictures on Instagram,” she said. “I really am hungry for life... physical things, experiences.”

If time scrolling through social media is passive time, what might be an active use of your time? Maybe it's meeting a friend for coffee, writing, reading, learning an instrument. Detachment from our screens isn't just about the time we get back, but also about the way our minds work when they aren't thinking about any phone-related activity. It's hard to argue against the notion that our digital lives are starting to give us a skewed sense of reality. For a while, the internet seemed to open up opportunities for us to devour information to which previous generations didn't have easy access. But now that we've set ourselves up with selected news feeds, we've stopped actively seeking out different views. Our new mission might be to become active explorers of the world again, instead of waiting to be told what to believe.

With modern life, getting rid of our devices entirely isn't very practical. But there are physical things you can do to spend less time on your phone. You can delete your social media apps, and only use the desktop versions. You can set yourself a digital curfew for when you must disconnect. You can simply leave your phone at home. (I do this now, only keeping my work phone with me during the day). But before you try any of these techniques, first think about what you want to do with the time you take back. If you're not sure, simply blocking yourself from your phone won't help — there will always be something else to take its place.

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## **You’re Never “Just” a Church Member**

by Erik Raymond

“I’m just a church member.” Over the years, I’ve heard people say this when introducing themselves. There are many reasons why someone might say this (they may want to clarify that they aren’t in full-time ministry). But I cringe inside when I hear it. And if I’m able, I offer a gentle correction because there’s no such thing as “just” a church member.

This isn’t a difficult premise to prove. Consider what God says about those who are church members. They have come to believe the gospel, receiving Christ Jesus as Lord (John 1:12; Rom. 1:16; Col. 2:6). They are loved before the foundation of the world and then were adopted into Christ’s body (Eph. 1:4–5). They are adorned with the everlasting righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21) and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). They are the object of God’s unwavering love and joy, even the subjects of his songs of gladness (Zech. 3:17). God surrounds them with shouts of deliverance (Ps. 32:7). They are ambassadors of the King of kings (2 Cor. 5:20) who represent him in this world. They are his children and heirs, destined for glory (Rom. 8:16–17). They are part of his family, his body, the church (1 Cor. 12:27). And our Lord Jesus Christ is not ashamed of any of his family, even happily embracing all of them as his “brothers” (Heb. 2:11).

I think this is one of the reasons why the Apostle Paul ends some of his letters by talking about a bunch of people we’ve never heard of. He wants to remind us that kingdom work is accomplished by ordinary people. Take the ending of the book of Romans, for example. To punctuate this magisterial theological treatise, he sprinkles in well over 30 names of people who, in varying ways, partnered together for the advancement of the gospel. We might be tempted to say that many of them were “just” church members.

But they’re not.

When we read through the chapter, we find people like Epaenetus, the first convert to Christ in Asia (Rom. 16:5). What a trophy of grace! We see people like Urbanus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, who were labeled workers in the Lord (Rom. 16:9, 12). Paul even labels some, like Mary and Persis, as those who worked hard (Rom. 16:6, 12). They were people like Prisca and Aquila who sacrificed for the mission, even risking their necks for Paul’s life (Rom. 16:3–4). They were people like Rufus’s mother, who was like a mother to Paul (Rom. 16:13). There were warm, loving relationships that so blessed the Apostle. On and on, the list could go. Yes, they were ordinary people, like you and me, but they weren’t “just” church members. They were servants of Christ who worked hard to advance the mission of the kingdom to the ends of the earth.

My point here is not simply to edit a phrase from your vocabulary. That wouldn’t do anything. Instead, I want to inject it with a measure of the biblical significance and beauty found in the New Testament. If you’re a member of Christ’s body, you’re never “just” a church member. You are a privileged member of a royal family granted the infinite and eternal blessing of serving to advance the kingdom of grace. We should never diminish this!