

Take iControl

Ten strategies for less stress and distraction and more of what matters to you

eBooklet by Lael Arrington

The average person...

...checks their phone 150 times a day

...checks Facebook 14 times ...processes 450 texts a month. The average teen processes 3,700 texts a month.

You know you need this if...

...you fall into bed feeling jangled, your mental circuits too overloaded to slow down and sleep ...you struggle to get your real life stuff done

...you suspect that Proverbs 18:1 might offer some wisdom: "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment." ...you think about unplugging but feel stressed by FOMO (fear of missing out)

...you're feeling a little more bored lately



...you
peek into other people's lives online--all wow! and
wonderful@--and get pinged by a little Facebook envy
...you post something that doesn't register with the
almighty Facebook algorithm and you feel

...you want to strengthen your relationships with the people that matter most to you

...you want to experience God in your life more this year ...you know the changes you need to make but you need more motivation to actually *do it*

...you flunk the Internet Abuse Test on p 10-11

unappreciated, less than

Ten Strategies to a more hi-touch, joyful life:

#1: Step away from the phone

We warmly greet our friend and sit down, eager to catch up. But we leave our phones where we can see them. And when the conversation lags...

Our child tugs on our sleeve, "Mommy..." "Just a minute, Honey, Mommy just needs to check this text/email/fb message/tweet/ snapchat...."

Don't miss your life. Do a digital detox. Give your undivided attention to an important task. Give yourself the gift of being in the moment. Enjoy real life--the scenery of the world God created, the presence of the people he loves.

Plan the way you will spend your detox time—phone calls, writing hand-written notes (LeaveNothingUnsaid.com), time

Lounging in the sun and chatting with a friend without the intrusion of texts and alerts into our lives felt positively luxurious. That night, I even switched off my phone while mingling at a house party, content to be in one place for the evening and not distracted by any indecision about whether another party posted online looked hetter.

--Jenna Wortham
New York Times

with friends—something hi-touch or outdoors, physically removed from your machines.

Break out of the sedentary life. Stir your creativity. Make your own fun. Enjoy the freedom of being in control of your phone/pad/TV/ console/computer. Rather than it controlling you.

If you need to, email, text or Facebook or tweet your family and friends that you are going off-line and give them a phone number where they can reach you if they really need to.

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#2: Turn off the screen(s) and go to bed

How many millions of hours of sleep are lost because we can't just turn our machines off and go to bed?

One more video, one more article, a few more pictures, keep scrolling down Facebook...Are you a night owl like me? Join me in the struggle to stop "pursuing your desire." Choose instead to get the rest you need to do the things you desire even more. How much of what we surf and sample

do we even remember, much less use or grow from? We're just having fun. Being entertained.

Recreation restores (re-creates) our soul. Re-energizes us for the things that matter most. Fun that diminishes our rest, that steals our morning time with God or the self-nurturing we or our children need to begin our day is not bringing us more joy. And joy is the point.

Nothing is Strong

Hi-tech adaptation of Screwtape Letters to a Jr devil on how to entrap his prey, by CS Lewis

You no longer need a good book to keep him from...his sleep; a [Twitter feed of people famous for being famous] will do. You can make him waste his time not only in [Facebook chat] he enjoys with people he likes, but in conversations with those he cares nothing about on subjects that bore him.

You can make him do nothing at all for long periods. You can keep him up late at night, not roistering, but staring at a [blue screen] in a cold room.

The Christians describe the Enemy as one "without whom Nothing is strong". And Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away the best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what, in the gratification of curiosities so feeble that the man is only half aware of them

It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing.

If we write down what's important--our goals--even a few, then we can use those final moments of the day to review them and think on how to calendar the next steps toward accomplishing them. Commit your real-life plans to the Lord in prayer and go to bed.

Every ping promises an opportunity and we get a squirt of dopamine for answering the bell. "These rewards serve as jolts of energy that recharge the compulsion engine."

—MIT media scholar

#3: Opt out of email on your phone

Email was conceived as a way of messaging someone when it was convenient for you. Or responding to someone else's message when you had time to think about it and respond.

But what has happened? When we put email on our phones we receive all these messages at a time when it's not convenient, when we are right in the middle of focusing on some other important person or matter. If we unlink the applications we can silence the constant pinging of email, Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat and focus on what matters more.

It's good for our health. Constant accessibility results in a high-stress lifestyle. For all the times we check our phones, only once in a great while will we get a bit of news or connection that gives us a real ping of pleasure. But that little spurt of dopamine lures us into hyper-vigilance and an always-on state of arousal.

Just like the gambler glued to the slots, we constantly scan for the next hit. Living in that sustained state of arousal elevates our stress hormones (cortisol) and the feeling of depletion.

More cutting-edge productivity experts (Michael Hyatt, Greg McKeown) are taking email off their smart phones except when they need it to advance a critical project.

#4: Multi-task less; time-slice more

Beyond the stress factor, the productivity of multitasking is a myth. Reams of research show us that we cannot multitask very effectively. We can only time-slice, attending to one thing right after another. When we think we are multi-tasking we are really time-slicing so thinly that we are not as productive as we imagine. The US Air Force teaches its pilots how to time-slice properly because their intensive research shows them that pilots cannot effectively split the signal.



Also, experts tell us that "batching" is more effective than trying to accomplish a task here a little, there a little. Our life has an intellectual and emotional flow to it. If we keep interrupting our focus to attend to this message and that email, it takes more time to get reoriented when we pick up what we were doing.

We accomplish more with more excellence and less stress if we "batch" our email, our texting, our returned phone calls at a time when we can sustain our attention.

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#5. Acknowledge your FOMO (fear of missing out).

The texts, tweets, emails, pins and Facebook newsfeed/ messages rush by and you don't want to miss something important.

When things are stripped down, when we are in great distress, we realize that the greatest gift is the presence of one we love. Face to face. Eyes to eyes. We are hardwired from the factory to be soothed and comforted and lifted up by their eye contact, touch and their words of empathy. It is the ultimate gift and the loss that tears us up when they are gone. Real face-to-face presence.

The more we dilute that presence with the constant disruptions of social media the thinner our lives will be. We can literally train ourselves to devalue the most important thing in life. By constantly framing our communications in

Ask yourself 3 questions:

Who is really important?

How do you feel when that person gives you their presence as a gift, lavishing time and attention on you?

How does God give you the gift of his presence?



140-character exchanges we can stunt our own capacity to find our way into the life of another person with questions and comments that engage the life of the heart.

Do you really want to live in continuous search of greener-grass digital reality and miss living IRL (in real life)?

Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. He loves us so deeply he left heaven to be with us and he went to prepare a place where we can be with him forever.

Ask him to take that fear and help you fully give your presence as a gift in this moment. Like Mary sitting at his feet in Luke 10. Picture yourself in Vermeer's painting holding a smart phone instead of Martha holding a basket. Hear Jesus saying, *Lael*,



Lael you are distracted and worried by many things, but only one thing is necessary. Choose the good portion, the richer life, which will not be taken away from you.

We know that a richer life is a life of good relationships with God and friends. It's giving your time and attention to listen with a heart to learn and give in return, undistracted. How might you manage your entertainment and social networking so that it would help you give your presence to others, rather than take it away? Be intentional about this.

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#6 Exchange background cable news TV for music.

Is cable news the sound track of our lives? Do we really want the "Breaking News!!!!" graphics and dramatic musical flourish to constantly intrude into our thoughts? Our conversations? CS Lewis was not a fan of what he called "the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and microphone

of his own age." He famously remarked that if anything really important happened he would hear about it.

In today's Entertainment culture the gold standard of value is whether or not a program can grab and then hold the public's attention. And since what grabs attention is fear and pleasure, cable news pays big bucks to music composers, graphic designers, editors, wardrobe consultants and an elite few on-air personalities who learn how to manipulate fear and pleasure to keep us dialed in.



In *New York* magazine Mary

McNaughton-Cassill, a professor at the University of Texas—San Antonio and leading researcher on the connection between media consumption and stress, said the current trend of breathless, protracted coverage of tragedy and calamity can induce a feeling of malaise. "What I tell people is that you really have to get conscious," she said.

"Stop consuming news like a hungry teenager wolfs down a Pop-Tart."

Jesse Singal—New York magazine

We already know this. Being aware of it in the moment can help us decide, No, I don't want to be distracted by an artificially contrived presentation of bad news that tempts me to fear and suppresses the good news of God bringing redemption and beauty into our fallen world.

Rather, calm yourself with quiet. Commit the needs to prayer. See if God wants you to somehow respond. Then leave it in his hands.

Exchange the news background for a music background. One that enhances your activity. Cleaning house? Crank your rock music favs. Trying to think or converse? Choose music that doesn't engage you too much intellectually or emotionally. People who listen to classical music often report better mood and productivity. Sixty beats per minute seems to be optimal. Focusatwill.com provides a subscription music service to heighten productivity with different channels for different moods or time of day.

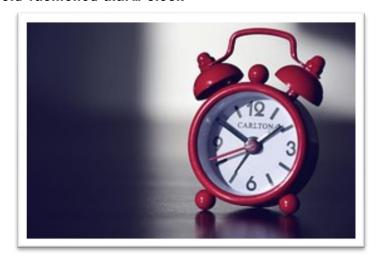
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#7 Go low tech in the bedroom with one old fashioned alarm clock

Technology is one of the biggest sleep disruptors. Yet most people sleep with a mobile phone nearby.

Leave your smart phone and tablets where you can check them after breakfast. Make the connectivity in your bedroom the kind that God created. Dial into your spouse.

If you like to read, real books may afford you more sleep than an e-reader. According to a December 2014 study at Brigham and Women's Hospital, using short-wave, blue



light-emitting e-readers (iPad, iPhone, Nook Color, Kindle and Kindle Fire) before bedtime can make it harder to fall asleep.

Use your bedroom or create some other tech-free nook to be alone with your thoughts; be alone with God. Acquiring the spiritual discipline of solitude and reflection makes for a richer life. The constant barrage of other voices leaves less and less room for God's Spirit to be at home in our lives. Guiding.

Prompting. Opening the eyes of our hearts to really see.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! When I awake, I am still with you" (Psalm 139:17-18).

The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

Put a lamp and a Bible by your bedside. Pick some verses to memorize to begin your mornings with God. Right now mine are from Psalm 139 and 27.

As CS Lewis said, ""It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in."

When we begin the day by greeting God instead of reaching for our phones it brings us into his presence and starts our day with his companionship.

Many of us reach the end of a day full of concerns and questions. How will we process them? By suppressing them with the distraction of TV, Facebook, Netflix or YouTube marathons?

Make a space where you step away from all the other voices clamoring for your attention. Get to know what you think and what you want at the very center of your soul.

We become our own person when we take the time to think our own thoughts. Even stronger personalities get wobbly when they are constantly pulled into the magnetic force field of so many other voices.



Have a conversation with yourself. (Why are you downcast, O my soul?") We are meaning and pattern-seeking creatures who need time to interpret our lives and extract meaning and assign value to our days.



Comfort yourself with God's promises and commit your needs/worries to him in prayer. Whather we journal it or not, this kind of reflection and strengthening ourselves in the Lord Jesus grows our character and bears more fruit—all of which makes for a richer, more joyful life.

Maybe you're thinking...But I really need a phone in case of emergencies. If you don't have a land line consider a new trend: a flip phone!

What? Yes! Join the ranks of Rianna, Kate Beckinsale, the editor of Vogue magazine and Senator Chuck Schumer—all choose the retro chic flip phone for different reasons. It's indestructible, cheaper and protects from getting addicted to

email and social media. It makes for a versatile companion to a tablet. You can take your emergency calls without disrupting the sanctuary of your bedroom.

#8 Instead of Facebook Envy < Facebook Empathy

Happiness is about having the right expectations. So what happens when we scroll the Facebook days of our friends lives—their vivid experiences, proud accomplishments, relational connections, beautiful destinations?

Envy= the painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage.

Webster's Dictionary

Two studies of Facebook users document that it can result in a comparison deficit, envy, loneliness and even depression. It messes with our expectations.

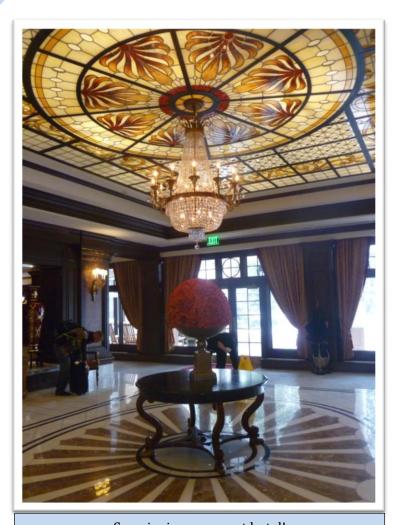
You're feeling alright about living single until you see your friends' engagement or wedding pics. You're happy about your job until your neighbors announce their new promotions or great opportunities for investing their time and talents. We're fine with our home until we see our sister's kitchen redo.

And, according to the studies, the worst is vacation pics. We see them and We. Want. To. Get. Away.

Facebook makes us aware of the advantage, but it is our decision whether we will give way to discontent or resentment. Whether we will take out our tape measures and dwell on the comparison or, even worse, take out our credit cards and play catch up or, even worse, belittle or try to detract from our friend's advantage. It is not Facebook, but our own hearts that pour kerosene on a little spark of envy.

In 2 Cor 10:12 the apostle Paul warns us, when we measure ourselves by one another and compare ourselves with one another, we are without understanding.

We don't understand the true reality of Facebook or our friends' lives. A Stanford study reports that, "we tend to underestimate how much other people



So enjoying our great hotel!

experience negative emotions and overestimate our belief that they must be experiencing many more positive ones than ourselves."



What we mostly see on Facebook are the highlights reels of everybody's best moments and better selves.

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We don't see the private moments where they struggle with loneliness or unanswered prayer. The unhealed wounds. The physical pain. The sacrifices required by their daily lives. Things that *should* remain private out of honor and respect.

We could use a gentle reminder of what it means to love our friends: Love doesn't envy (1 Cor 13:4). It doesn't desire to possess "our neighbor's house; our neighbor's wife...his ox, his donkey, or anything

that is your neighbor's" (Commandment # 10). And if we forget for a moment that envy needs God's forgiveness, we remember that he is always willing to give it.



...share truthfully (and tastefully) of your own struggles. It will break the competitive cycle of expectations as well as the tape measures, and may just invite more "likes" than the vacation pics.

... look at Facebook through the lens of Romans 12:15: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."



People need a touch. A touch of real empathy. When you genuinely like something hit that "Like" button. Leave a comment. Commend the insight of a good article or comment. Don't just lurk or simply respond to your news feed. Visit the page of

someone who needs encouragement or attention. Tempted to overshare? Make it meaningful. Not approval driven.

Rather than let Facebook ratchet up expectations that will invite discontent, or torch your envy, take control. If you're in a weak moment don't peruse your friend's wedding pics or Caribbean vacation album.

God looks at us as choosers. Not victims. Ask him to help you give thanks for his gift to your friend. Post an update that thanks him for his good gifts to you.

Proverbs 15:2 The tongue of the wise commends knowledge. Proverbs 15:4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life. Proverbs 31:26 The teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

Electronic or Internet Abuse Test

Use the following scale to score
for each question:
0 = never or rarely
1 = occasionally (I seem to be
able to control it)
2 = often (several times a week,
but for a long time)
3 = always (every day, and for a
lot of the time)

- 1. You use and stay on the Internet/TV/video games longer than you intend.
- 2. Your school grades or your work suffers from how much time you spend.
- 3. Your parents or spouse or friends complain that you spend too much time.
- 4. You neglect or forget your chores or other duties because you are spending so much time.
- 5. You become defensive whenever anyone asks what you are doing.
- 6. Your sleep is affected, either because it robs you of asleep or you cannot get to sleep.
- 7. During the day, you spend time thinking about or anticipating when you will be able to get back on.

#9 Rewire Your Brain's Pleasure Center with the Joys of Simpler Pleasures

We're playing Jeopardy! The category is: "Things kids say for \$200." The clue is... "I'm bored." We all buzz in immediately: "What is kids' #1 complaint?"

A little Brain
Physiology 101:
our brains have a
pleasure center
that interfaces
with our
immaterial souls.
And it's very
sensitive to overstimulation. Too
much and it
gradually raises
the threshold of
releasing
endorphins that



make us feel happy. It's the famous "Law of diminishing returns."

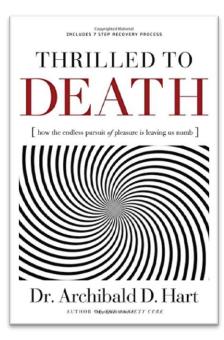
Psychologists and counselors are seeing more and more teens and adults who complain that they are so bored. They just don't enjoy life like they used to.

According to Dr. Archibald Hart, professor of psychology and Dean emeritus of the Psychology Department at Fuller Theological Seminary, the diagnosis is anhedonia--not having anything in your life that can move your heart.

You experience a decline over time of the ability to find joy in small events and simple experiences, even while seeking ever-increasing levels of stimulation. You lose your pleasure by becoming addicted to pleasure that is outside the box of normal existence. And, in its beginning and moderate stages, it's reaching epidemic proportions.

As with any addiction, or near-addiction, there is a way to recover your hijacked pleasure center. Dr. Hart counsels:

- Find someone who can serve as an accountability partner. Acknowledge your struggle. [Ask them to pray with you.]
- 2. Discuss [what is truly important in your life, how this addiction is costing you and] how little these activities are really necessary.
- Establish clear boundaries on what you can and cannot access as well as time limits that are reasonable.
- 4. Stick to your boundaries. No excuses!



In his book, Thrilled to Death [how the endless pursuit of pleasure is leaving us numb], Dr. Hart recommends specific ways we can reset the threshold of our damaged pleasure centers.

First, seek more of the pleasures that come from natural activities, such as eating healthy food, exercising, getting outdoors, rather than from artificially created excitement

Get enough sleep. Find time to relax, reflect and create. Eat for the right reasons.

Recapture the joy of little things: eating outside, reading in front of the fire, baking bread, playing with your dog, coffee with a friend, watching the sunset, helping someone in distress, looking through old photos, going for a ride... The more we digitally detox and pursue simpler pleasures, the more we will enjoy them as our pleasure centers heal.

Tell stories that help you relive pleasurable memories. Cultivate the daily discipline of gratitude [with 1000 Gifts by Ann Voskamp] and a gratitude journal. For many more strategies read Dr. Hart's excellent book and his newer release, *The Digital Invasion*.

- 8. You get mad when someone bothers you when you're on.
 - 9. When your system or machine is down, you get angry or upset to the point where others can see it.
- 10. You tend to check your messages compulsively-- more frequently than is really necessary.
- 11. You prefer the excitement of the Internet/TV/video games to the intimacy you can enjoy with your partner, spouse, or friends.
- 12. You find that while you say to yourself, I'll stop now, you continue your engagement.
- 13. When you are sad, down, anxious, or moody, going online or sliding the "on" button lifts your mood.
- 14. If you had to choose between the Internet/your machines and any other social activity, you would choose the Internet/ machines.
 - 15. You have more close friends on the internet than you do in real life.

From *Thrilled to Death* by Dr. Archibald Hart

Total your score and check results on p. 14

The brains of internet addicts show extra nerve cells for speed in the areas that control attention, control and executive function, like the brains of drug and alcohol addicts; ten to twenty percent shrinkage in areas that process speech, memory, motor control, emotion, and sensory and other information.

Newsweek

10. Reflect a bit: Is your need for validation or control driving your over-indulgence in your screens?

If you struggle to gain iControl, it might be good to ask yourself...what motive lies beneath? Why am I so addicted to Twitter/Facebook etc? Why can't I say "no" or "later" on my terms? Ask yourself, "When I text/tweet/message am I expecting or even demanding an immediate response? Why is that? I'd like to suggest a possibility:

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The prophet Ezekiel says we have hidden idols of the heart. You just might be controlled by a hidden heart idol, not your true heart in Christ.

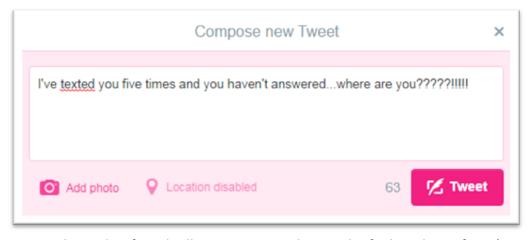
How might a hidden idol of approval be driving the tyranny of iConnection in your life?

Amy posts countless selfies and picture after picture of her with her husband. Her with her kids. Her in new outfits. Her with her latest creative project. And then she labors over the captions, writing and rewriting for laughs or shock value. And then, after

she posts, she monitors the "likes" and responses with eager anticipation. Not enough and she feels let down, spurring a new round of uploads.

Amy is in the grip of a heart idol of approval. She is not confident in who she is, beloved by God. So she needs continual validation by her tribe. The red flags are there in her quantity, labor and disappointment when her tribe doesn't come through with enough attention and approval. Asking for validation like this may bring it, but with a price. Your friends may respond out of pity and their respect for you may diminish.

The pressure to carry on a continuous, witty commentary on the days of our lives" exhausts and overwhelms. And we are the ones putting the pressure on ourselves



Jeanette sends tweets like the one in the image. Lots of them. Especially to her bf Nan. If Nan is slow to respond she gets angry. She spends time wondering what Nan could be doing that's so dang interesting. She wonders if Nan is

out with another friend, Allison. Her gut tightens. She feels jealous of Nan's time with other friends.

Offline she strategizes how she might intercept Nan in the carpool line after school and visit with her for a while. Jeanette is in the grip of relational idolatry.

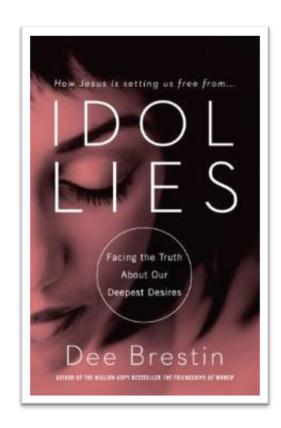
Nan has become more treasured than God in her life. She would never admit it. But her affection for God, for spending time with him and enjoying him comes nowhere near her affection for Nan. She's always wanting more of Nan.

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Beth turns in her exam. That evening and about seven times over the next 24 hours she texts her professor, wondering if the grades are up yet. In between she texts her husband repeatedly asking where he is and who he's dining with on his business trip. If he doesn't check in every hour or so she is miffed.

Beth struggles with hidden idols of control. The red flags are there in her expectations that people respond to her asap, even when it would be very disruptive to their lives. She expects her family to be constantly checking in. If she doesn't know where everyone is/can't reach them she feels "out there," ungrounded. She worries constantly.

If you suspect a hidden idol is driving your inability to take iControl I encourage you to watch Dee Brestin's video (#1) (https://deebrestin.com/idol-lies/), where she confesses her own idol of control. You may even want to buy her book and do her Bible study on Idol Lies, watching all ten videos as you read the book. Powerful. And challenging. #ouch



"Any starting point is good:
no devices at dinner, no
devices by your bed while you
are asleep, and then
gradually graduating to a
day of digital detox or a week
and then digital detoxes
while on vacation."
--Ariana Huffington
Huffington Post

God has not given us a spirit of fear or anxiety over approval or of needing to be so connected to someone that we're not ok when they are off living their own lives. He has not given us a spirit of needing to control our family, our colleagues or our friends.

2 Timothy 1:7 "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." We can make our own choices of how we communicate...for our convenience and for love. We can choose to control ourselves...not others.

The gospel is the power of salvation. The gospel not only has the power to reconcile us with God...it has the power, if we only ask, to help us live in love and self-control. Rather than our machines or idols controlling us.

Electronics/Internet Abuse Test Results

Total the score given to each question. The highest possible score is 45.

0 to 10: You probably do not have an Internet abuse or addiction problem

11 to 20: You have the beginnings and may be more hooked than you realize.

21 to 30: You are an Internet addict/abuser, and your addiction may be harming your social and personal life.

Over 30: Your abuse or addiction is so severe that you should consider getting professional help for it.

You can listen to my interview with Dr. Hart on his book, *Thrilled to Death* at laelarrington.com
Radio Q&A page
Interview #6

Wrapping it up

Perhaps the greatest threat to our happiness is the way our screens draw us into isolation.

Ask any writer and they will tell you they spend way too many hours alone on a computer. That would include me.

I am grateful beyond words for the wealth of information on the internet. And the ability to take brief Facebook breaks to virtually connect with others.



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But it still isolates me. It's not the same connection that a phone call or face time provides. As discussed earlier, relationships—with God *and* people--are built on presence, face time.

Proverbs 18:1 grabs us and tells us that what drives us to isolation is the pursuit of our own *desire*. We *like* to watch this movie, this program, this YouTube sports clip. We *like* to surf, and post pictures and watch others online. It's such an easy, passive default. Just sit and click.

The sluggard of Proverbs 19 is caught in a passive rut, so trapped in "The Nothing" that he can't even move his hand from his dish to his mouth. As am I when I cannot close my laptop and move a phone to my ear.

Ultimately, the over-stimulation of our screens + passive indulgence of desire = a diminished ability to enjoy the company of others. They simply aren't as entertaining. They don't capture and hold our attention. Even the ones we care for most.

And what of the ailing grandfather, the friend whose life is a mess? The baby who can't yet talk? How will we respond to "the least of these"? The most vulnerable and weak? Isolation and indulgence can make loving them even more daunting.

With a power beyond our own, for the joy set before us, let's break out and live a real life, create a real culture of hope and love. Let's take iControl.