

# Slow Down Experiment

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Habits for Love Project, Part 2

*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. —Colossians 3:16-17*

## Intro

Scripture is filled with instructions about our attention. In the Psalms, we are told to “delight yourself in the Lord” and that the “blessed” person is the one who meditates on God’s instruction “day and night.” Colossians calls us to seek to have Christ’s message dwell “richly” among us, and repeatedly exhorts us to be thankful. These are all, in different ways, about attention. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that *rightly orienting our attention lies at the very center of the Christian life*. We believe and are saved as we “hear” (an act of attention) God’s Word. Love is the fulfillment of the law, and it is an act of attention. And it is as we savor God’s goodness—again, an act of attention—that we learn to rest.

Which is why it’s a pretty big deal that we are losing our capacity to pay attention.

In recent history, everything has been getting faster. We travel faster, we get information faster, we cook faster. The rate of change itself has gotten faster—things go out of date far more quickly than they used to. In all of this, our pace of life keeps accelerating. We’re going at an unsustainable speed, and the result is that we are experiencing what philosopher Hartmut Rosa a “time famine.” We never feel like we have enough time. And that makes it really difficult to stop and pay attention to anything.

Our digital age makes things worse. It’s hard to sustain deep meditation on God’s Word as we are bombarded with links declaring stuff like, “Man hugs a wild lion; you won’t believe what happens next!” More concerningly, neuroscientists tell us that the way we use our minds actually reshapes our neural pathways. Our ongoing use of the internet, with its hyperlinking, infinite scroll, and attention-seeking algorithms is rewiring our brains and taking away the ability to maintain sustained, thoughtful attention.

In fact, the hyperspeed and hyperstimulation of the age have so formed us that what is healthy now feels uncomfortable. Slowing things down and absorbing less stimulation makes us edgy, impatient, bored. We feel the need to reach for our phones to get a dopamine hit. As a result, true rest at times can become almost impossible.

## Distraction Detox

In this next step of the “Habits for Love” project we want to face that challenge head on. We’re inviting you intentionally to pursue slowness and de-stimulation to the point of

discomfort. The goal is to help our minds get more of a sense of what healthiness feels like—what it feels like to have the capacity of giving attention where we want to give it. Think of it as a kind of “distraction detox;” a “mental reset.”

We’re encouraging you to make temporary changes—just two weeks—in your speed of life and your interactions with digital media.<sup>1</sup> Nothing of what is listed below is biblically required; there is nothing particularly holy about any of the suggestions. Some of them are more likely to “fit” your life better than others. Again, the goal is simply to help our minds grow more comfortable in slowness. Consider which of these suggestions would be most helpful to you.

## Slowing Down

- Drive slowly, no faster than 5mph over the speed limit. Stay out of the left lane on highways (even if your lane is going slow!), and come to full stops at stop signs.
- Wait in the longer grocery line at the store and (instead of pulling out your phone) use the time to pray or think.
- Consistently arrive to events 10 minutes early—and again, use the extra time to pray, think, or talk to people (no phone).
- When waiting for food or coffee to be served at a Starbucks or restaurant, keep the phone in your pocket and just wait.
- Take the next two Sundays completely off of work and productivity.
- Avoid anything that might be classified as “multitasking,” including listening to a podcast or audiobook as you walk, drive, etc.

## Digital

- Make your phone as dumb as possible. Remove social media apps from your phone and disable all notifications, if possible (or at least as many notifications as you can).
- Set your phone so that it only displays in grayscale (our minds are rewarded by bright colors and are less likely to pursue distractions in black and white).
- Go off of social media completely.
- Put your phone to bed at 8:30 PM and don’t look at it again until after you’ve had time to pray in the morning.
- Choose to forego TV one (or more) nights per week.
- Only check email at set times, twice a day. Remove email from your phone.

After you’ve thought this through, take some time to note down (in whatever way works best for you) which of these you’re going to do over the next two weeks. (The actual act of noting it down makes it more likely you’ll do it). Take stock of the choices you’ve selected. Are they sufficient to make a real difference for a couple of weeks—to make you even a bit uncomfortable? As you’re deciding (and especially after you’ve decided), talk with others, whether family or friends, so that you can help each other see this through. And pray that God will use this time to help your attention turn more fully to him!

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<sup>1</sup> Many of these suggestions are adapted from John Mark Comer’s *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*.