

A person is holding a black smartphone in their right hand, which has a ring on the ring finger. They are sitting at a wooden desk. In the background, there is a laptop, an open notebook with a pencil, and a person's hands typing on the laptop. The scene is softly lit, suggesting an indoor setting with natural light.

30 days of
Digital Decluttering

to put technology in its proper place.

Cayce Fletcher

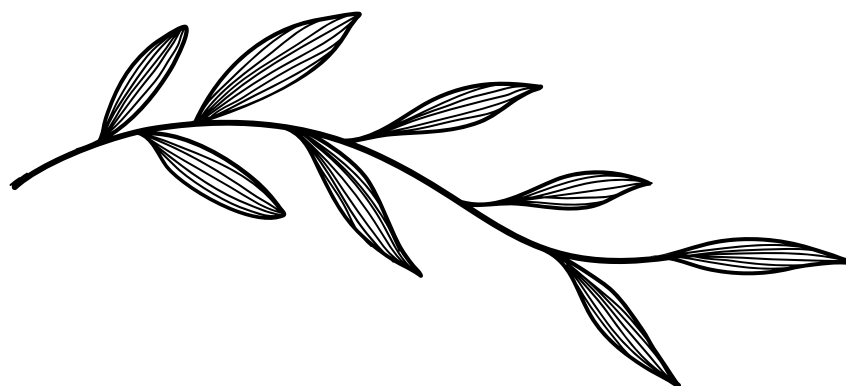
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Here to help you create a life you love and cultivate your heart for God.



About the Author

Cayce Fletcher is a wife and mom of two. She is passionate about helping others create a more beautiful life as they pursue a lasting relationship with God. Find more of her work at amorebeautifullifecollective.com.

We've got a problem.



We all do. We are drowning in the noise of the constant firehouse of social media, 24/7 news, maxed-out inboxes, and thousands of other notifications. We yearn to live more focused lives, but we are too distracted to make that a reality. So, we give up and turn to our society's new drug of choice: technology. It's so pervasive that we use it for everything: our budgets, our babysitters, our meal plans, our medical records. Real life doesn't seem like real life. We feel like we really live online.

Do you feel like you are drowning in noise, emails, and pressure from social media? Do you feel powerless to stop the scroll? In this guide, you will get 30 actionable steps spread over 30 days to start to declutter your digital footprint and limit your screen time. You will learn some tools that you can use for the rest of your life. This is the first step to a more focused, intentional life!

The challenge is split into four sections: Reflect, Limit, Curate, and Replace. First, you have to analyze your current screen time behaviors. You need to figure out how much time you spend on screens, what you are doing when you are on screens, and what you are trying to get out of screens. Then, you will begin to start setting boundaries around your screen time, limiting the time and influence you let screen time have in your life. After this, you will curate and declutter your screen time. You will set a vision for the types of media you want to use, and you will work to make sure that what you are listening to, watching, and reading lines up with your ideals. You will also do some spring cleaning, and delete digital clutter like emails, old screenshots and photos, and unused subscriptions. Finally, you will consider ways you can replace your screen time with other activities that help you to be more focused, productive, and intentional.

As you start your journey to digitally declutter your life, I encourage you to share this resource with a friend and have them go through this process too. We are putting technology in its proper place.

30 Days of Digital Decluttering

Checklist

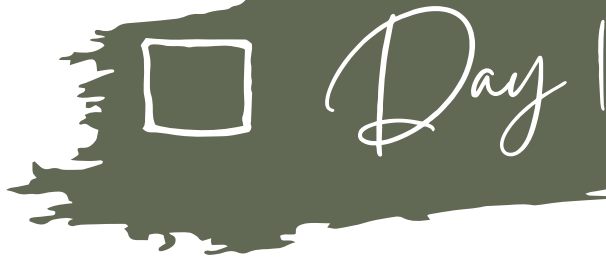


- Day 1. Do a screentime inventory.
- Day 2. Journal about your technology use.
- Day 3. Put your phone to bed.
- Day 4. Set screen time limits for apps.
- Day 5. Remove bad influences from your feed and inbox.
- Day 6. Create a screen-free morning routine.
- Day 7. Turn off notifications on your phone and inbox
- Day 8. Set household rules for screen time.
- Day 9. Be intentional about background noise.
- Day 10. Limit to one device at a time.
- Day 11. Set up a digital inbox to collect any tasks that need to be done in a central place.
- Day 12. Set boundaries around social media.
- Day 13. Connect with someone off social media.
- Day 14. One hour of screen-free time a day.
- Day 15. Begin to do Morning Pages.
- Day 16. Curate your apps.
- Day 17. Curate your inbox.
- Day 18. Curate your pictures and back up the keepers onto a hard drive.
- Day 19. Curate your watching and listening time by going through your videos, shows, movies podcasts, music, and audiobooks.
- Day 20. Practice keeping your phone face down - or put away - during conversations.
- Day 21. Get to Inbox Zero.
- Day 22. Determine the best system for your daily tasks.
- Day 23. Do a digital spring cleaning of documents on your laptop or desktop.
- Day 24. Declutter your physical tech items.
- Day 25. Take back the enjoyment of your photos.
- Day 26. Write a letter to someone to catch up rather than relying on social media.
- Day 27. Replace screen time with other screen-free activities.
- Day 28. Replace screen time with outside time.
- Day 29. Have one screen-free day a week.
- Day 30. Figure out the next steps to keep technology in its proper place.



30 Days of Digital Decluttering

Part 1: Reflect



Your Task: Do a screentime inventory



Today, we are focused on learning more about your screentime behavior. You need to know your general patterns to know how you should move forward with your digital decluttering.

Begin by doing a screen time inventory. Turn on your screen time app or keep track of your screen time with a pen and paper. Just down how much you use screens, and what you are doing during your screen time.

30 Days of Digital Decluttering

Part 1: Reflect



Your Task: Journal about Your Technology Use.



Look through your screen time inventory. What are you trying to accomplish with your screen time? These are some of the primary reasons we continue to turn to technology even if we aren't actively choosing to:

- Productivity and work
- Being informed
- Being entertained
- Connecting with others
- Escaping stresses from the world
- For likes, recognition, and influence
- Because it feels good

Knowing the why behind your screen time usage is the first step in figuring out the best ways to set boundaries around that usage. Journal about this.

30 Days of Digital Decluttering

Part 2: Limit

Day 3



Your Task: Put Your Phone to Bed.



Today we are going to start limiting your usage. We are going to practice a reverse screen time elimination diet. We are going to focus on one area at a time, declutter that area, set boundaries and curation practices, and then move on to the next. The first boundary we are going to set is with your phone. You are going to practice the rule of putting your phone to bed before you go to bed away from your bed. You can turn your phone off or leave it on, but the goal is to place your phone away from where you sleep so that it is not the first thing you look at in the morning and the last thing you look at at night.

30 Days of Digital Decluttering

Part 2: Limit



Your Task: Set Screen Time Limits for Apps



Look at your screen time on your phone. If you have an app, start to set some limits on apps. Keep in mind your original usage. You want to be realistic about what limits you could actually accomplish. Determine what boundaries you would like to have around your gameplay, social media usage, and TV time. This is the goal you are working towards over the next few weeks. You are not aiming for perfection, just intentionality.



Your Task: Remove Bad Influences from Your Feed and Inbox.

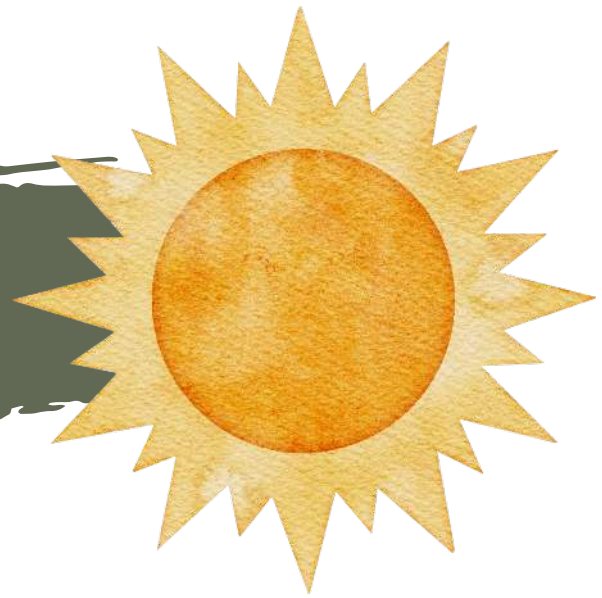
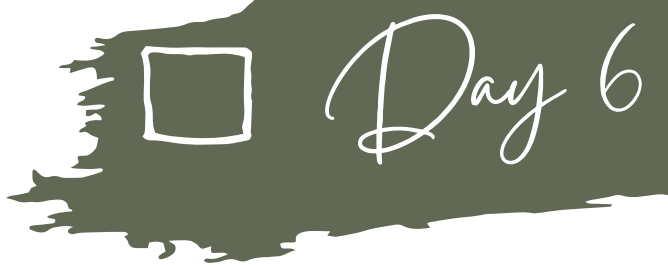
As we work on decluttering our digital life, one of our primary goals is curation.

Social Media makes money through the use of the algorithm. We are living in an attention economy. But, what captures our attention is not always the most life-giving thing. There's a saying in journalism, "If it bleeds, it leads." So, we are force-fed stories that make us feel anxious and depressed.

On the other hand, we also tend to follow people that we admire the aesthetic of. We aspire to have this same 'look' in our lives but often feel discontent when we can't meet the faux perfection of influencers. Our feeds can affect our mental health, our happiness, and how we view our homes, relationships, and lives.

This is why curation is so important. When we curate our content, we are limiting ourselves and setting boundaries on what we are taking in. This means we pick and choose the best content. This includes what makes us happy and makes us laugh, but it also includes content that pushes us to live up to the ideals that we've set for ourselves.

If we find ourselves discontent or being pushed in a direction away from God, we need to get rid of that influence on our lives. That means unsubscribing, unliking, or unfollowing from those influences. As you interact with your different digital spaces in the coming weeks, recognize how the content you are taking in is affecting you as a person. Remove content that puts a strain on your mental health or leads you to live in a way that is not righteous and good.



Your Task: Create a screen-free Morning Routine.



Our screens influence us tremendously. At times, our technology use seems like it is controlling us rather than the other way around. We have to put it in its proper place. Screens - and technology in general - are tools that we can use to accomplish more than we could do with our own power. But, it is often co-opted and put to use as an idol instead.

We don't normally worship screens, but we use screens in order to worship other things, whether that's attention, money, comfort, or entertainment. On top of this, we begin to desire that dopamine fix given through screens, and so, we become addicted to screens. This creates a downward spiral of being addicted to the medium and using that medium to worship idols. We spiral out of control until we are completely off the right path. Limiting your screen time is the first step to putting technology into its proper place, and hopefully, you've been seeing the benefits of this so far.

The next step is to order your days so that technology is not the priority. Our days often end as good as they begin, and this means we need to be mindful of what our first influences are in the morning. Those influences will set the course of the day. If you have set your phone away from your bed, you should be waking up without it being your primary focus. Now, start a rhythm of waiting to check your phone until you've completed a morning routine that includes some kind of quiet time, journaling, or spiritual focus. Lysa TerKeurst says, "We must exchange whispers with God before shouts with the world." This may mean you have to change up your bible reading plan to be paper-based. And, it may mean you have to wait to catch up on the news and work. Create a routine that allows for those whispers with God.

30 Days of Digital Decluttering

Part 2: Limit



Your Task: Turn Off Notifications on Your Phone and Inbox

Technology is so pervasive because it triggers a dopamine response in our brain, similar to drugs or other pleasure-based activities. This is why it is so difficult to keep a handle on our technology use. We can be pleasantly going about our day, but then our phone pings. We desire to know what's going on, and our brain knows that it will get a dopamine fix if we look at our phones. And so, we pick them up. Once we've picked them up, the never-ending scroll begins. So, today, we are going to focus on curbing that habit by removing the prompts.

Go to the settings on your phone and computer and turn off notifications for everything except that which is absolutely necessary for school or work. Answer the question: Do you really need to know every time someone has liked or commented on a social media app? Or do you need to know every time your phone game has new hearts? No, you don't; not if you are intent on curbing your screen time.



Your Task: Set Household Rules for Screen Time

When we set goals for ourselves, we are always affected by the behavior of others. We are motivated when others work towards those goals with us, and we can be sidetracked when they don't have the same goals. Our screen time is no different. If we want to be mindful of our own screen time, then we need to work towards a general household 'rule', or rhythm, for screen time. If you want to limit your kids' screen time, but you are always on your phone, then it won't be very effective. If you want to stop watching TV all the time, but your spouse automatically turns it on, you are never going to be able to meet your goals.

Set some guidelines for the following types of technology concerning (1) the type of content you'll allow, (2) the allowed location of devices, and (3) the time allowed for each type of screen time activity:

- Phones, apps, and direct messaging
- Social Media
- Music and Radio
- Podcasts
- TV and Movies
- News
- Video Games

Note: We will not spend a day focusing on our video game usage, so use today to consider what boundaries you want to place on video games including phone, computer, and console games. Games may be an enjoyable pastime for some and a serious addiction for others. Be honest with yourself about your video game usage, and consider the messages that video games are teaching you and your family. You can set boundaries today surrounding the amount of money and time you will spend on video games as well.

30 Days of Digital Decluttering

Part 2: Limit

Day 9



Your Task: Be intentional about background noise.



So far, we've talked about being intentional with our 'active' screen time. However, there is another type of screen time that can add to the digital clutter in our lives. This is 'background noise' that is going on all the time around us. When you leave the TV on or are always listening to podcasts, music, or the radio, that can add to your mental fatigue. It's a form of noise pollution, and it's digital clutter. Background noise is not a bad thing, and I love to work while listening to music or a good podcast. But, you need to recognize that you must be intentional with the background noise. Is it contributing to the chaos in your home? What type of atmosphere is creating because of it? Do you enjoy what you are watching or listening to in the background? Or is it just a habit you need to change? Start to keep tabs on what is playing the background. Then, replace anything that you don't enjoy with more life-giving versions.

□ Day 10



Your Task: Limit to one device at a time.

In the West, we love to talk about being productive. One of the primary things that makes us feel like we are being productive and getting things done is to have a lot of things going on at one time. That frenzy of activity doesn't accomplish any more than focusing on one thing at a time. It just feels like that because you are doing two things at once. Your brain is more overwhelmed and taxed.

In the same way, there is a certain level of mental stimulation - or dopamine - that's generated each time you interact with certain technological tools. When you create a baseline of dopamine, you start to desire more. So, you start to interact with more technology to try to get that "feel good" feeling. It's a cycle of addiction that is always desiring more.

One way we achieve more is to interact with two or more screens at the same time. We are binge-watching a show while also scrolling Facebook. Or we are playing a phone game while trying to work on a project on our computer while watching a clip on YouTube in the background while refreshing our Facebook feed on another tab.

Multitasking can be good if you are throwing in a load of laundry to go while you're finishing up a paper. Or, when you are washing the dishes while chatting with your spouse about their day. But, in the digital sphere, multitasking with multiple screens just leads to distracted work and minds. Practice limiting what you are doing to one task. If you are working, limit your social media use. If you are on social media, don't try to switch between responding to work emails and scrolling. If you are doing something, allow yourself to do that thing fully, even if that thing is entertainment.

□ Day 11



Your Task: Set up a digital inbox to collect any tasks that need to be done in a central place.

Hopefully, you've noticed a change in the amount of notifications you get on your phone. By limiting notifications from certain apps, you've freed up your focus. Our phones, and to a certain extent our computers, are so multifaceted that we use them to connect with families, work, be entertained, get information, learn about the world, and more. Some of the information we get from our devices is meaningless - meaning it doesn't have any bearing on our day-to-day activities. But, some of the information is very important. Bills are paid online, medical notices are sent via app or phone call, and birthday party invites are delivered on social media and text.

We have to sift through all of the meaningless information to find the actionable tasks. Then, we have to stop scrolling long enough to write those things down. You need to set up a way to collect this information from the never-ending digital firehose. You need an inbox. Now, I'm not talking about an email inbox. I'm talking about a way to collect information so that it is contained in one place.

You need to create a digital inbox. There are a few ways of doing this. You could create a separate email account to email yourself things you want to remember. You can text yourself and it will show up as an unread text and you'll have a notification. Or you could use an app or blank document to keep track of ideas.

Technology is a tool, and just because something is digital doesn't mean that it's useless or meaningless. The point of the inbox is to start to engage with the information online so that you can use what you learn to impact your life and make it better. The first step to do this is to remember it. And the first step to remembering is to capture the idea and write it down.



Your Task: Set boundaries around social media.

As you start to curate your social media feed - unfollowing and unfriending influences that you don't need in your life, you may start to see that you don't have as much in your feed that you need to look at and read. You may also start to see that you don't have quite as many negative feelings surrounding social media. Social Media is a big generator of digital clutter in our lives, and it is one of the biggest time sucks that we have in our lives. Today, we will set some boundaries surrounding social media.

(1) Scrolling Time: Your screen time app limits will help to limit your overall time on different social media apps, but you can take it a step further by limiting your scroll time. Think about your current habits and desires to look at social media, and then determine how much you want to limit your scrolling time. I came to a point where I realized that I kept breaking my set limits on my scrolling time. So, I decided to limit myself to no scrolling time. I still have social media, and occasionally check my notifications, but I do not look at my feed. Your boundary could be a set time a day, or it could be that you check the feed once a week.

(2) Posts: Determine what you want to post. Are you posting so that you can look at your feed later on in your memories? Are you posting to keep your family up-to-date? Are you posting to get likes? Are you posting to bolster your image? Posting itself is not bad, but you have to be very honest with yourself about your reasoning behind the posts. If you find that you have negative reasons, you may need to take a break. You should also ask yourself during this time if what you're posting is okay in terms of the people you are posting about. If you are venting about friends or family online, you really need to think about the privacy of those people. Even posts that are positive but a little too personal and intimate should be limited or foregone altogether.

(3) Comments: The comment sections on social media can sometimes be positive, and occasionally informative, but more often than not, they are just full of vitriol. You need to determine for yourself the boundaries you are going to place around comments. Are you going to look at the comments? If you look, does it make you upset? Do you find yourself writing angry responses? Maybe thinking about the argument you had in the comments later that day. You could set boundaries like never reading comments, only posting positive things in the comments, or choosing not to argue back even if someone comments on something you don't agree with. Focusing on these areas and creating some defined boundaries will help you to have a more healthy relationship with social media.



Day 13



Your Task: Connect with someone off social media.

After I limited my social media time, I realized that I started craving real in-person relationships. Social media is like the junk food of relationships. We see people and maybe comment on their photos, so we feel like we have connected with that person. But, really, we are still lonely. We don't get all the benefits of a real in-person relationship - laughter, deep conversations, accountability, authentic encouragement - when we focus on only connecting with people online. Often, we end up feeling more lonely and disconnected after spending time on social media.

Once you start to limit social media, you will feel a little lonely and disconnected because you are. Social media, and some messaging apps like Snapchat, are the primary way we connect with others. You have to start to add ways of connecting with people that don't involve heavy screen time usage. For those who live close by, you could have a standing weekly or monthly tradition, like a playdate for moms, coffee date, game night, or other activity.

You may also notice that people who seem to be a big part of your life fade away because you were only keeping up with them through social media. You can grieve old friendships, but by limiting your social media time, you can finally put those friendships to rest and turn your focus to people who are walking alongside you right now in your present circumstances.

Connect with someone off social media today through a phone call or in-person conversation. If you don't have time today, schedule time for it later this week.



Your Task: One hour of screen-free time a day.

You have been hard at work creating boundaries surrounding your technology use and screen time. Now, you are going to continue adding in some more boundaries. Our phones are often right beside us at all times throughout the day. In fact, the average number of phone pickups - or the amount of time you check your phone - is between 58-100 times a day. Even if your general screen time usage is going down, you still may be tapping your phone and checking it frequently throughout the day. Sometimes, this is by necessity. But, we want to make sure that we are doing things intentionally, not just out of habit.

To check the number of pickups, you can go to the screen time settings on your phone. We are going to try to curb this number by adding one hour of screen-free time a day to our days (in addition to your screen-free morning routine).

I would recommend making your dinner and family time at the end of the day your screen free time. This is time to just focus on connecting with your family and unwinding from the busy day you've just had. You can place your phone away from the dinner table. If you still feel the urge to check it, you can invest in one of the Aro boxes to force you to have this screen-free time.



Your Task: Begin to do Morning Pages.

You've done some soul-searching over the past two weeks and set quite a few boundaries around your screen time. We often use different forms of technology, especially social media, to be our sounding board. You may have noticed as you set boundaries around your technology use that you need another outlet for your thoughts.

Today, begin doing morning pages to get out your thoughts, rather than posting or commenting about them. Morning Pages is just a journaling practice where you write down, long hand in a journal, three pages worth of thoughts. It is supposed to be stream-of-consciousness writing; you are just getting down whatever you are thinking on the page. Morning Pages is such a valuable tool to add to your morning routine because it builds time in your day to reflect on what you are feeling and what is going on in your life. It is a very cheap, effective form of therapy as you reach insights into yourself, your behavior, and the world around you through just writing out what's going on in your mind. You make the subconscious evident when you write. Studies have shown that women who journal have better mental health than those who do not. These journals help you to voice your opinion without shouting it on a social media platform, where you are constantly concerned about other's perception and reception of your ideas. I normally do my Morning Pages every weekday, taking a break on the weekends.

Today, just practice journaling three pages. If you find the practice helpful, continue to do it whenever you have the chance.



Day 16



Your Task: Curate your apps.



The next few days will be focusing on curation. You began this process by curating your social media feed. Now, we are going to start really focusing on your digital clutter on your devices. Today, we will focus on curating the apps on your phone.

First, go through your app subscriptions. Cancel all that you don't absolutely need. You may be surprised at what you are paying for.

Then, go through your home screen and remove apps you don't need or want. You can also organize your apps to make things easier to find. Some categories for your app could include Productivity, Health, Exercise, and Entertainment. On an iPhone, you can organize these apps into folders. Or, you could just rearrange them to be easier to find.

You want to make apps that make you into the person you want to be easier to find, and apps that you really don't want to open but can't bring yourself to delete are harder to find.



Your Task: Curate your inbox.

In a world of social media, it seems like email is going the way of a physical mailbox. The only personal emails you may get may be ads, notifications from apps, and blog subscriptions. This means our email inbox can easily get out of control.

Emails themselves are not a bad thing. They can notify you of great sales, let you know when your favorite blogger has released a post, and even bring in daily devotions. You need to curate your inbox so that you are receiving only the things that you actually want to consume. This means you need to unsubscribe regularly from emails that you don't want. There are a few websites and authors that I absolutely love, and reading the articles on that website is life-giving. I want to know when they release an article. That means an email from them would make the cut. But, if there is a website that regularly sends mass emails from a company that I don't even really care about, I will unsubscribe.

After I quit social media and stopped scrolling, I realized that I was missing certain pieces of information in my life, like fun things to do locally and updates from my favorite bloggers. My inbox was decluttered because I unsubscribed from several sites I didn't care about. So, I actually ended up subscribing to several blogs and news sites. Curation is not just deletion. It's picking and choosing what you want to see, read, and watch. It's digital decluttering. It's bringing things you love and want to read into your life. A simple way to curate your inbox is to unsubscribe from anything you don't want and then delete the email. Then, subscribe to the best.



Your Task: Curate your pictures and back up the keepers onto a hard drive.



Our phones have become how we document our lives. They contain pictures of our little kids, our first homes, and our favorite memories. If you start limiting your social media usage, you'll find that you aren't posting everything online. This means that your photos are in a precarious place. When I first got married, I dropped my phone in water, and my phone was broken. All the pictures on that phone were lost, including pictures of my dog as a puppy and my senior year in college. I was sad then, but I can't imagine how heartbroken I would be now if my current pictures of my children as babies were lost. You may even be feeling this tension now if you have thought about deactivating your Facebook or Instagram, but pictures from the last 15 years are on there. It is functioning as your backup hard drive. You could go back through and redownload those pictures, but the photo quality on Facebook is notoriously bad and grainy if you print out those photos.

So, what should you do? Curate your pictures now, and backup what you want to keep on a hard drive. Be sure to delete any old screenshots or bad pictures. Only keep the best. If you haven't done this in 10 years, it may take awhile, but it's worth having a photo feed that is cleaned up and only contains things that you like to look at. You can also backup pictures onto a cloud-based program, like iCloud or DropBox to insure that you don't lose those precious pictures.



Day 19



Your Task: Curate your watching and listening time by going through your videos, shows, movies podcasts, music, and audiobooks.



Have you noticed if the background noise in your home is calmer? Is your home calmer as a result? What we listen to often has a profound effect on our mental headspace. There is a reason why religious services use worship songs and hymns to teach profound truths. The things we listen to get inside of us, and we often repeat the truths we hear and have memorized when the going gets tough and we don't have much left to give. We have an innate ability to memorize things if they are put to music, even if we aren't really trying to. Even if we don't realize that we're listening. Once they are inside of you, you often have memories that last a lifetime. Think about your favorite songs from middle school. If you played those today, you probably could sing every single word.

If you've been limiting your background noise, now is the time to replace it. Remember, curation isn't just deletion. It's choosing the best. To do this, you need to think about the messages being preached by your music, podcasts, and audiobooks. Are they inspiring you to be a better person? Are they teaching you truths about God and life that are good and righteous? The messages they are preaching will be ingrained into your brain whether you want them to or not. Why not use the things to which you listen to teach yourself meaningful and wonderful ideas? These things set the tone for your home and your life.

In addition to this, you want to limit what you watch. Many shows, movies, and videos have dubious life messages they are promoting. Others just have no real value - entertainment or otherwise - that they are adding to our lives. Pick the best and toss out the rest.

As you are limiting your watching and listening time, you may realize that you aren't using several of the streaming services that you used to. Take this time to cancel any subscriptions you don't use on a weekly basis. You may also want to practice picking just one service to subscribe to at a time and getting rid of the rest to help curate what you want to watch naturally. If you find you are only watching one or two shows on repeat, you could always buy the DVD or digital versions of those shows and then cancel the streaming service you are using.



Day 20



Your Task: Practice keeping your phone face down - or put away - during conversations.



You've been practicing restraint over the last few days as you continue to put your phone and other devices away for one hour a day of screen-free time. Now, you are going to practice showing that restraint while building deeper connections with those around you. There have been studies that document that conversations take 7 minutes to truly start and become meaningful. Every time someone looks at their phone, they are setting the clock back to zero. The outcome of this is that conversations are not really going anywhere. Without conversation, we are not able to cultivate meaningful relationships.

So, today we are reclaiming conversation by making conversations with others a phone-free zone. When you are having a conversation, try to keep your phone put away or flipped over so that you are not checking it. Focus on just the conversation at hand. With everyday conversations with the people you live with or work with, determine phone times and conversation times. If you are drifting into conversation times, put the phone away and focus. Give your family, your spouse, your kids, and your friends your attention. In this attention economy, they are the ones who deserve it.



Day 21



Your Task: Get to Inbox Zero.



Have you noticed a difference in the amount of emails you are receiving? Now, that it is (hopefully) more manageable, you can actually go through your emails and read the ones you care about. Today, we are focusing on getting to inbox zero across all informational channels, meaning that the little red dot you see in your emails, messages, and voicemails should go away.

Now, I recognize that everyone has a different system for how they deal with unread notifications and alerts. Some people are not bothered by the red dot. Some people - like me - use the red dot to alert me that I need to do something about the notification. If you have been practicing sorting actionable information into a digital inbox to go through periodically during your weekly review, which you can learn more about in our series on getting things done from a godly perspective, then you should be able to remove those notifications without forgetting that you need to do something about them. That means you should be able to get to inbox zero and conquer the red dot once and for all.

If you have thousands of unread emails, then you could probably do a big purge. Just skim through and delete anything that doesn't look important especially if it's from a year or two ago. If it was important, the person or company would probably reach back out to you.

Make a daily or weekly practice of getting to inbox zero. If you've curated your inbox, this means you'll actually want to read the emails. But, often if you let too many emails come in it gets too overwhelming and you won't read any. Making a habit of reading and then deleting them means you get to read the content that you want to as you remove digital clutter from your life. If you want to keep the content to refer back to, just keep your email inbox sorted by unread which moves all your unread emails to the top so you can quickly go through them.



Your Task: Determine the best system for your daily tasks.



If you have been following this process, you will find that you have grown aware of your normal screen time habits. You have set boundaries around many different areas related to technology use. Now, it's time to be honest with yourself and figure out which apps are helping you and which are hurting you.

Determine whether you should go analog or digital with certain tasks. This is best figured out through trial and error over the course of many days. You should figure out whether you prefer ebooks or paper books. Whether you prefer a digital Bible versus a physical Bible. A Google Doc versus a pen and paper pencil. A paper planner versus a calendar app. Figure out which apps are helping you to accomplish tasks and which are hurting those.

I have found that I prefer a paper planner, but I track my reading on an app. I always reach for a printed book, but I prefer buying groceries with an app rather than in-store. You may need to switch things up, moving from pen and paper to digital or vice versa. If you decide to not use an app, be sure to remove it from your phone so that you are not getting notifications from it.



Day 23



Your Task: Do a digital spring cleaning of documents on your laptop or desktop.



One of the many uses of our devices is work. We aren't as in control of the digital clutter that our work produces, but we can still clean out and organize documents, photos, and files. Today, you are going to clean out and organize your digital documents. Folders are your friend.

As you sort through documents, delete anything that is not worth saving. Be sure to back up anything that is worth cleaning. Clean up your desktop home page as well sorting files into appropriate folders. I try to never leave a file on the homepage by itself unless I am currently working on it. If you primarily use a cloud-based workspace, clean up that workspace instead. Again, every document should be in a folder. I keep all my writing for the blog in Google Drive. Any unfinished document is in the main drive folder, and then, I move the finished document to an appropriate folder.

You can set up any system that works for you, as long as it's organized. Your goal is to limit the overwhelm here by giving every document or file a home. Once you're finished, update your computer and phone. You can also update any browsers or apps if they aren't set to automatically update.

30 Days of Digital Decluttering

Part 3: Curate



Day 24

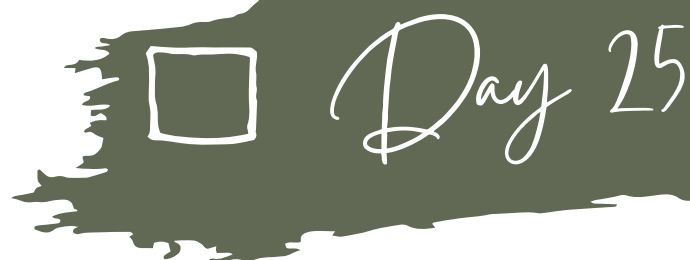


Your Task: Declutter your physical tech items.



We've been focusing on our screen time habits and digital footprint so far, but we often accumulate quite a few physical items related to all our devices. Today, you are going to declutter and organize those items.

Gather up all the chargers, charger blocks, controllers, remotes, old devices, and old cords. Donate or throw out anything you don't currently need or use. Check for frayed cords and throw those out as well. Order any new items you may need like charger blocks or cables. Determine a home for all your tech items. I like to have a charging station with charger blocks and cables in a larger box that has room for a surge protector as well. You can designate a closet for larger gaming consoles, CDs, and DVDs. Go ahead and put anything that needs to be recycled, donated, or thrown away in your car so you can dispose of it.



Your Task: Take back the enjoyment of your photos.



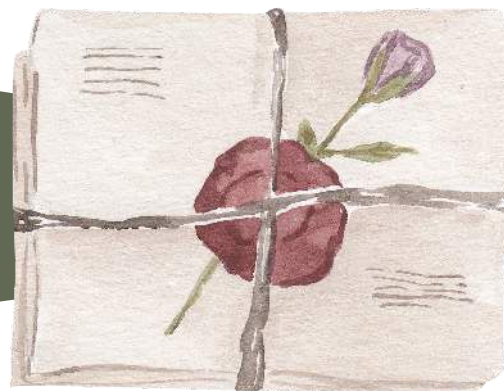
We have decluttered most of your digital life in the past few days by focusing on the idea of curation. Starting today, we are going to be focusing on ways of replacing the tossed-out digital habits with life-giving ones. We will focus on our photos first. Because of social media, our pictures are often taken with a filter, both literally and metaphorically. We want to curate our image and show the best parts of ourselves to the world. You've set boundaries on what you post, but that doesn't mean you should never take pictures. If you are posting less, you will have to start taking back the enjoyment of your photos from social media.

Take Pictures just for you. If you are having a great day and want to remember that moment, take a picture. Take pictures of family get-togethers, favorite traditions, and special getaways. Importantly, these photos may never be shared with anyone outside your small circle of friends and families. You are taking these photos just for you and your family.

Print out your favorite pictures to put in a physical box or photo book. This isn't adding clutter to your home. It is continuing the process of curating your photos. If the photo makes you smile, you should keep it someplace safe. Often photos stored on a backup hard drive will never be looked at again. By putting them in a physical place, you will continue to pull them out and look at them. They can be passed down as well. You may think that you're family will not appreciate them, but as I have lost members of my family, I have grown to treasure those family albums. As always, curate the best and toss out the rest.



Day 26



Your Task: Write a letter to someone to catch up rather than relying on social media.



Hopefully, you have kept up connecting with others in person and off of social media. Even so, you may feel sad or like you are missing out on certain relationships with those who live far away. Today, we are focusing on the habit of building connections with our long-distance loved ones. If you have been keeping up with the routine of morning pages, you may have started to see a change in your mental health and the amount of connections are making between what you read, listen to, and talk about. Writing is generative and creates so much growth in our understanding and our perspective.

In the past, people regularly had times of thoughtful writing as they communicated with family and acquaintances through letters. The telegram and then telephone put a stop to most letters, especially after email. However, conversations over email and text - and even phone calls - are always limited.

If you've felt like you are missing out on connecting with someone because you have limited social media, take a moment today to write them a letter. Ask real questions, and don't be afraid to go deeper than you would on a text or email. You may even find yourself asking the same questions that arise in your morning pages in your letters. Letters allow you to connect with others even if you don't live in the same time zone or have the same schedule, but it is a long-form communication that you aren't able to achieve with text and voice messaging apps. You can respond when you get the chance to at your own convenience.



Day 27



Your Task: Replace screen time with other screen-free activities.

As you limit screen time, you will find that you have a growing amount of time that is unfilled at home. You want to use this time well. You want to be intentional about that time. The goal of this digital decluttering is not to be completely screen-free; it is to set boundaries and curate.

How do you know when you are spending too much time on screens? How do you live 'guilt-free' about your current amount of screen time? By a simple equation, you want your 'production' time to equal or surpass your 'intake' time. If you want to have a meaningful and fulfilled life, you need to make sure that you are producing things of value. This won't happen if you spend most of your time taking in information or entertainment without producing things.

As you are limiting screen time, you need to replace that time with other activities, particularly activities that are with your hands or your words that produce something of value. This is part of how we care for our souls. Gardening, painting, writing, playing music, cooking, sewing, and woodworking are just a few examples of ways to produce things of value that don't involve screens. You may even find that time spent doing these activities is much more life-giving than an hour spent on your phone.

You can also bring back some "old-school" entertainment options like board games, puzzles, reading, storytelling, singing, and playing music for alternatives to screens. These analog activities bring enjoyment and help to slow you down. Pick one or two screen-free activities you can add to your day that involve working with your hands or spending time with the people you love.

30 Days of Digital Decluttering

Part 4: Replace



Day 28



Your Task: Replace screen time with outside time.



The statistic is that children today spend an average of 4-6 minutes outside a day. Tally up your own 'outside time.' Being outside has so many benefits that reverse some of the negatives of technology, including the negatives related to our eyesight, circadian rhythms, and weight. Being outside naturally gets us out of our heads and grounds us in the world. It makes us look up and puts the rest of the world in perspective.

Spend some of your new-found tech-free time outside in nature. Embrace the discomfort you feel, and embrace the opportunity to strengthen your resolve, muscles, and mental health through the activities you can do outside. Pick one of the following activities to do today: hiking, gardening, other yard work, laying in a hammock, building a campfire, going for a walk, playing a sport, blowing bubbles, or doing sidewalk chalk with your kids. Remember the saying: "There is no bad weather, only clothing." The more you go outside, the more comfortable you will feel outside.



Day 29



Your Task: Have one screen-free day a week.



This last step is a culmination of everything we have done over the last almost 30 days. We've limited screen time, set boundaries, and curated the best content. We've also found ways to replace the time that used to be taken up with screens.

Today, we are going to use these skills to begin to practice a digital sabbath. A digital sabbath is one day a week when you fast from your screens. As with any fast or sabbath time, you are replacing the time that you would spend on your phones with time spent connecting with God through prayer and worship. Sundays are a perfect day to practice this if you already do a regular sabbath.

You can decide how strict you want to be with this. It could be that you limit any work or entertainment, but you still keep your phone on for emergencies, phone calls, and texts. It could be that you turn all devices off and keep them locked up all day. Doing a screen-free day once a week will help you detox from your devices, keeping them in their proper place. It can also jumpstart keeping a regular sabbath as well. If you don't have access to a device, it will be a lot harder to work on projects and check emails. If this seems like too much, you could always take baby steps, like leaving your phone off and up during Sunday morning services or every Sunday afternoon.



Day 30



Your Task: Figure out the next steps to keep technology in its proper place.

You've made it! Over the course of the previous 30 days, you have worked hard to understand your own technology use, declutter your digital footprint, replace some screen time with screen-free activities, and put technology in its proper place.

We all will have a different relationship with technology. For some of us, technology is unavoidable and often enjoyable. And, so you will always use technology to a certain extent. This is okay! Hopefully, by now, you will have set boundaries around your technology use and curated the best content and activities.

For others, you may want to take it a step further and continue to work living a screen-free lifestyle. The next steps will give you a few ideas of what you can do now to limit technology.

Today, take some time to journal about your technology use and what your next steps are going to be. You can add back in some technology you've been avoiding after today, but be sure to do it mindfully, reflecting on how each type of activity you do online helps or hurts you. Remember, technology is just a tool, and you are in control of it. Continue to work to put technology in its proper place as you digitally declutter your life.

Next Actions



- Turn your phone on grayscale. (You can find this option in your phone's settings.) This reminds you that the real world is full of color, not the digital world.
- Turn off the auto-play on your streaming devices to limit the time you spend binge-watching.
- If there is an option to attend in person or online, try to choose in person, especially when it comes to church services.
- Turn off data on certain apps you don't want to use at work, outside, or while you're with friends. This creates another boundary around your time on your phone.
- Downgrade your phone (or your phone plan) to force yourself to go more low-tech.
- Choose to not update your phone and other tech with newer versions.
- Pay cash for new phones. Don't finance it with long contracts.
- Print out resources you normally look up online like meal plans, recipes, and driving routes. Make a physical binder for the things so that you don't have to depend on your computer or phone to look them up.
- Practice memorization for bible verses, phone numbers, poems, songs, and driving routes. In this way, you limit your dependence on your phone.
- Participate in the 1,000 hours outside challenge. The goal is to do as much outside time as screen time (maybe even replacing screen time altogether). This equals about 3 hours outside a day.
- Set boundaries around your screen time to only 2-3 hours of passive entertainment (not video games) a week. Family movie night is a great way to still have a little screen time while also setting boundaries around it.
- Keep a physical address book of acquaintances, friends, and family to make writing letters and visiting others easier.
- Continue to write letters to people, call them on the phone, and schedule face-to-face conversations with those who live close by. Remind yourself that connections can be built off of social media.
- Remove your TV from your living room, and replace it with a projector. The difficulty of setting up the projector every time you want to watch something will make choosing screens a much more unappealing option.
- Set a timer to automatically turn off wifi at a certain time to set boundaries on your internet usage (and eliminate some EMFs).
- Deactivate your social media accounts for a time (or for forever) and journal about the experience.
- Begin to collect DVDs of favorite movies and shows to potentially cancel all streaming services. You can find them cheaply now because most people have moved to streaming services. Most libraries also have DVDs you can check out.
- Set a household rule to wait to get a phone until a certain age, like 8th grade, 13, or 16 (driving age).
- Limit devices to common areas. Remove devices from bedrooms.
- Do a digital fast when you are on vacation. This works in one week of screen-free time a year.
- Go no screens for a month. Limit screen time to only what has to be done for work and school.