



Technology Your Master or Your Servant?



Vol. 102, No. 2 2021 ENGLISH

Produced Each Issue: 68,097,000

Available in 208 Languages

Awake! (ISSN 0005-237X)

July/August 2021 is published by
Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of
New York, Inc.; Harold L. Corkern, President;
Mark L. Questell, Secretary-Treasurer;
1000 Red Mills Road, Wallkill, NY
12589-3299, and by Watch Tower
Bible and Tract Society of Canada,
PO Box 4100, Georgetown, ON L7G 4Y4.
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Society of Pennsylvania.
Printed in Canada.

For the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Jehovah's Witnesses
1000 Red Mills Road
Wallkill, NY 12589-3299

For CANADA:

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Georgetown, ON L7G 4Y4

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Is technology your master or your servant? Many would say that they control their devices, not the other way around. But technology can affect people subtly in ways they do not realize—even in ways they do not want.

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HOW DOES TECHNOLOGY AFFECT

YOUR FRIENDSHIPS?

Thanks to texting, email, videoconferencing, and social media, two people can communicate easily, even when they live continents apart. For them, technology is a useful servant. However, some people who primarily use technology to maintain friendships tend to . . .

- show less empathy for their friends.
- feel more lonely and empty.
- focus more on self than on others.





WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

EMPATHY

Empathy requires that we slow down and patiently consider another person—something that may seem difficult to achieve with an overload of social media posts and rapid-fire texting.

In time, if technology is controlling you, responding to your friends' messages can seem like another chore on your to-do list. Your goal becomes to clear out your in-box rather than to help a friend in need.

TO THINK ABOUT: How can you maintain “fellow feeling” when you use technology to communicate with friends?—1 PETER 3:8.

EMPTINESS

One study found that many people felt worse after browsing through a popular social media platform. The researchers concluded that looking at the pictures and updates of others can leave a person with “a feeling of not having done anything meaningful.”

Furthermore, looking at the exciting photos others have posted can lead to negative comparisons. After all, it may seem as if everyone else were having a good time, while your own life is in a rut.

TO THINK ABOUT: When using social media, how can you avoid negatively comparing yourself with others?

—GALATIANS 6:4.

SELF-FOCUS

One teacher notes that some of her students seem inclined toward one-sided friendships in which their greatest concern is, “Who has my back?”* Such friendships focus merely on what one gets out of the relationship. A person could start to view his friends as apps that can be used and shut off as needed.

TO THINK ABOUT: Does what you post online show that you may have the tendency to be competitive or to focus too much on yourself?

—GALATIANS 5:26.

* Reported in the book *Reclaiming Conversation*.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

EXAMINE YOUR USE OF TECHNOLOGY

When technology is your servant rather than your master, it will help you keep in touch with your friends and even draw closer to them.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Love . . . does not look for its own interests.”—1 CORINTHIANS 13:4, 5.

Check the suggestions you would like to implement, or write down your own ideas.

- ☐ Have more in-person conversations (rather than solely relying on texting or email)
- ☐ Put away (or silence) the phone when conversing with others
- ☐ Cut back on the time spent scrolling through social media
- ☐ Become a better listener
- ☐ Contact a friend who is going through a hard time
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

ASK YOURSELF . . .

- Do I have genuine friendships with people I care about and who care about me?
- How often does a phone call, text, or notification interrupt an in-person conversation I am having with a friend?
- Could the photos and comments that I post on social media give the impression that I am focusing on myself?
- How do I feel after a period of browsing through social media?
- What adjustments could I make so that my use of technology does not prevent me from making true friends?

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.”—PHILIPPIANS 2:4.

“Friendships take time and effort, so realistically you may only have a few. It’s not about numbers but about quality. True friends look out for your best interests, and you look out for theirs.”



EMILY

HOW DOES TECHNOLOGY AFFECT YOUR CHILDREN?

Children are so proficient at using technology that they are commonly called “digital natives,” while adults who are less adept at using technology are referred to as “digital immigrants.”

At the same time, some have noted that young people who spend a lot of time online tend to . . .

- develop a dependency on their devices.
- become involved in cyberbullying.
- be exposed to pornography, whether or not by choice.





WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

DEPENDENCY

Some online activities—gaming, for example—tend to be highly addictive. That is no accident. “The apps on our phones are designed to keep us at our phones,” says the book *Reclaiming Conversation*. The longer we stare at commercial apps on our screens, the more profitable we become to advertisers.

TO THINK ABOUT: Do your children seem overly attached to their devices? How can you help them make better use of their time?

—EPHESIANS 5:15, 16.

CYBERBULLYING

When online, some people become more aggressive, vulgar, and insensitive to others’ feelings—traits that can lead to bullying.

Some misuses of social media can be related to a person’s inordinate desire to be liked or followed. Or if a person finds out he was not included in some way—for example, he sees he was not invited to a party—this could make him feel as if he were being bullied.

TO THINK ABOUT: Do your children use proper manners online? (Ephesians 4:31) How well do they deal with feeling excluded?

PORNOGRAPHY

The Internet has made lewd content easily available and accessible. Parents should realize that while filters can help, they are not foolproof.

Sexting—sending or receiving explicit personal images, usually via smartphone—can have legal consequences. In some cases, depending on local laws and the ages of those involved, people who sext can be charged with spreading child pornography.

TO THINK ABOUT: How can you help your children resist the temptation to view or send sexually explicit images online?—EPHESIANS 5:3, 4.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

TRAIN YOUR CHILDREN

Although “digital natives” may use technology with remarkable ease, they still need guidance. The book *Indistractable* notes that giving children a smartphone or other device before they have the skills to use it properly is “just as irresponsible as letting them jump headfirst into a pool without knowing how to swim.”

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Train a child in the way he should go; even when he grows old he will not depart from it.”

—PROVERBS 22:6, FOOTNOTE.

Note the suggestions you would like to implement, or write down your own ideas.

- ☐ Discuss proper online conduct and manners with my child
- ☐ Help my child deal with feelings of exclusion
- ☐ Block inappropriate content to the extent possible
- ☐ Check my child’s phone periodically
- ☐ Set a time limit for daily usage
- ☐ Prohibit devices in my child’s bedroom overnight
- ☐ Ban devices at the dinner table
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

- Do we use a digital device as a babysitter to keep our child occupied?
- Does our child need a device with Internet access? If so, why?
- Can we afford to give our child a device with Internet access?
- How has our child already demonstrated self-control?
- How has our child demonstrated responsibility for his or her actions?
- What rules will we put in place?
- How can we help our child balance screen time with other activities?

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Mature people . . . have their powers of discernment trained to distinguish both right and wrong.”—HEBREWS 5:14.

“Why do your children want a phone? How do they use *yours*? What sites do they go to? What games do they play? How long do they use it? Test your children’s maturity and self-control before giving them a device.”



LAURETA, WITH HER
HUSBAND, DAVID

HOW DOES TECHNOLOGY AFFECT YOUR MARRIAGE?

When used properly, technology can strengthen the relationship between a husband and wife. For example, it can help a couple stay in touch throughout the day.

However, some spouses allow misuse of technology to . . .

- rob them of valuable time together.
- bring work into the home unnecessarily.
- create distrust and even disloyalty.





WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

TIME TOGETHER

A husband named Michael says: “Sometimes when my wife and I are together, she isn’t really ‘there.’ She’s busy looking at her phone, and she says, ‘I haven’t been able to check until now.’” A husband named Jonathan says that in such situations “spouses can be physically together and yet seem miles apart.”

TO THINK ABOUT: How often does a phone call, text, or notification interfere with quality time that could be spent with your spouse?

—EPHESIANS 5:33.

WORK

Some people have to be available around the clock because of the nature of their secular work. Others, whose jobs are not so demanding, still find it difficult to leave their job behind them at the end of the day. “It’s hard not to check every phone call or text message that I receive for work during time that I’ve set aside to spend with my wife,” admits a husband named Lee. A wife named Joy says: “I work from home, so work is always present. It takes effort to be balanced.”

TO THINK ABOUT: Do you give undivided attention to your spouse when he or she is speaking to you?—LUKE 8:18.

LOYALTY

One poll found that suspicious use of social media was a common cause of marital fights. Ten percent of those surveyed admitted posting material online that they keep hidden from their spouse.

For good reason, social media has been called a “marriage minefield” and even “an adultery service.” Not surprisingly, divorce lawyers say that social media plays a significant role in many of today’s marriage breakups.

TO THINK ABOUT: Do you hide from your spouse communications with someone of the opposite sex?—PROVERBS 4:23.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

SET PRIORITIES

A person who neglects eating will not stay healthy. Similarly, a person who neglects spending time with his or her spouse will find it difficult to maintain a healthy marriage.—Ephesians 5:28, 29.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Make sure of the more important things.”—PHILIPPIANS 1:10.

Discuss which suggestions below you would like to implement, or write down your own ideas for keeping technology from interfering with your marriage.

- ☐ Have at least one meal together each day
- ☐ Create periods of time to unplug from our devices
- ☐ Schedule a date night or other special time together
- ☐ Keep our devices off at night, away from where we sleep
- ☐ Set aside 15 minutes daily to talk to each other, without devices nearby
- ☐ Turn off Internet access at a specified time
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR COUPLES

After you and your spouse consider the following questions separately, discuss your answers with each other.

- In what ways can you use technology to *strengthen* your marriage?
- In your opinion, to what extent does technology interfere with your time together?
- What improvements would you like to see?
- How difficult is it for you to leave work at work? Would your spouse agree with your answer?
- How can you show reasonableness when it comes to the time and attention that you expect from your spouse?

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Let each one keep seeking, not his own advantage, but that of the other person.”—1 CORINTHIANS 10:24.

“I work from home, so I try to stop work at a set time. I also turn off email notifications after a certain hour so that I can use my phone for things like checking the time without being distracted by work.”



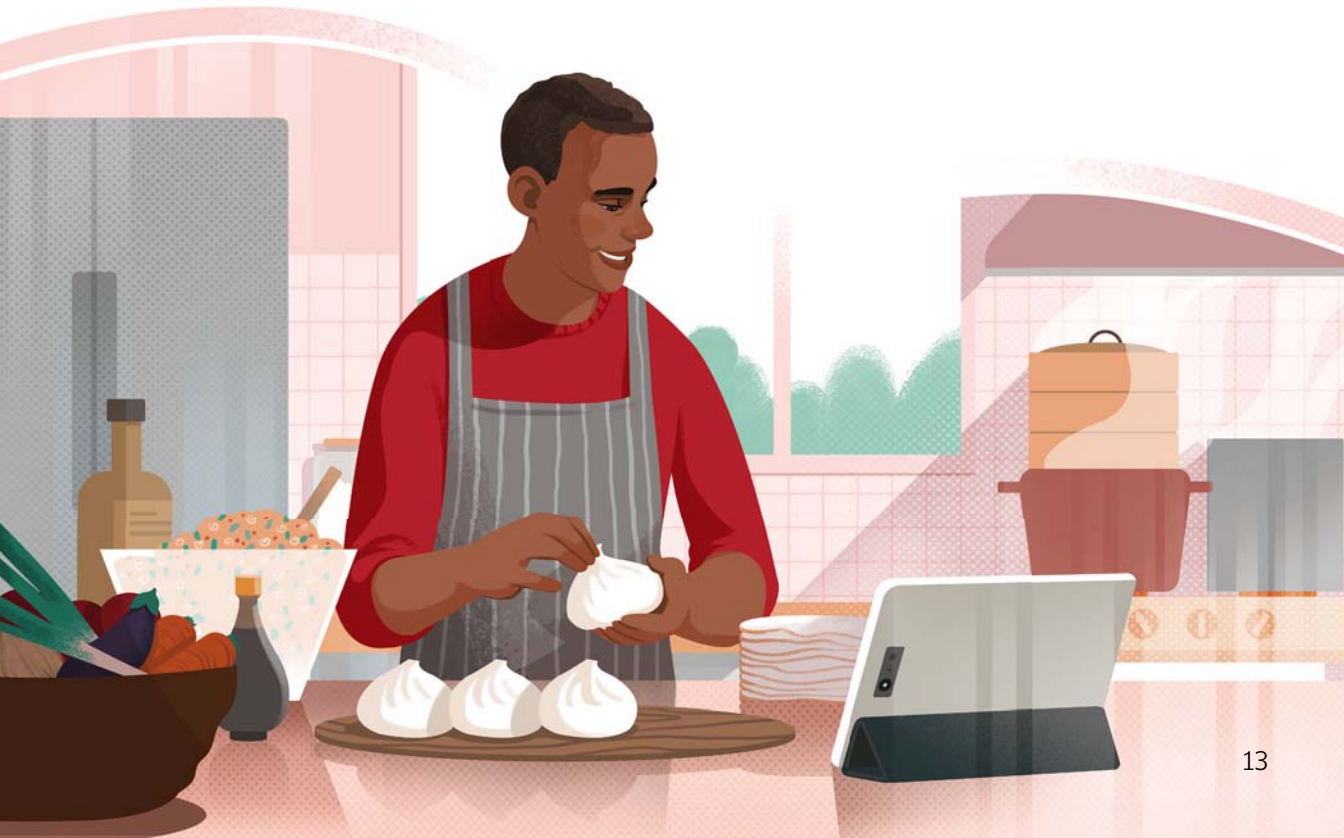
JASON, WITH HIS
WIFE, ALEXANDRA

HOW DOES TECHNOLOGY AFFECT YOUR THINKING?

People are constantly learning—whether for school, for work, or for other reasons. Technology can help. Never in history has it been so easy to access so much information, without having to leave your home or even get up from your chair.

However, many who make extensive use of technology find that they . . .

- have difficulty concentrating while reading.
- have trouble focusing on one task at a time.
- become quickly bored in moments of solitude.





WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

READING

Some browse and scan material instead of patiently following an author's train of thought.

Skim-reading is fine when you need to find a quick answer to a question. However, it can hinder comprehension when you need to consider a subject more deeply.

TO THINK ABOUT: How well are you able to read long passages of text? How can doing so improve your learning?—PROVERBS 18:15.

FOCUS

Some people assume that technology gives them the ability to perform two tasks at a time—for example, to text friends while studying. But when their attention is divided, they may not perform *either* task well, especially when both require concentration.

Focus requires self-discipline, but it is well worth the effort. “You make fewer mistakes and have less stress,” says a teenager named Grace. “I’ve learned that it’s better to concentrate on one thing at a time and avoid the distraction of multitasking.”

TO THINK ABOUT: Does multitasking interfere with your ability to comprehend and remember what you study?—PROVERBS 17:24.

SOLITUDE

Some people become uneasy when they are alone in quiet surroundings, and they turn to technology to fill the void. “I get bored within 15 minutes if I don’t check my phone or tablet or turn on the TV,” admits a woman named Olivia.

However, periods of solitude provide a valuable opportunity for deep thinking—an essential part of learning, not only for young people but also for adults.

TO THINK ABOUT: Are you able to use periods of solitude to your advantage?—1 TIMOTHY 4:15.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

EXAMINE YOUR USE OF TECHNOLOGY

In what ways could you use technology to enhance your thinking skills? What uses could interfere with your ability to concentrate and learn?

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Safeguard practical wisdom and thinking ability.”—PROVERBS 3:21.

ASK YOURSELF . . .

- Do I have trouble concentrating when reading a long section of text on a screen? If so, what most often is likely to distract me?
- What steps can I take to reduce or even eliminate those distractions?

Tip: Start small by reading brief sections of text at first and then gradually increasing the amount. Read out loud, softly, to keep focused on the material.

- What adjustments can I make so that I have adequate time to think and reflect on what I have read?

Tip: Use the last ten minutes of a study period to review what you have learned.

- In what circumstances am I likely to try to multitask?
- What adjustments could I make so that I focus on one task at a time?

Tip: Keep your study area clear of distractions so that you are not tempted to multitask.

BIBLE PRINCIPLE: “Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding.”—PROVERBS 4:5.

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