

South Elkhorn Christian Church

LENTEN INVITATION TO

DIGITAL MINIMALISM

A GUIDED JOURNEY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

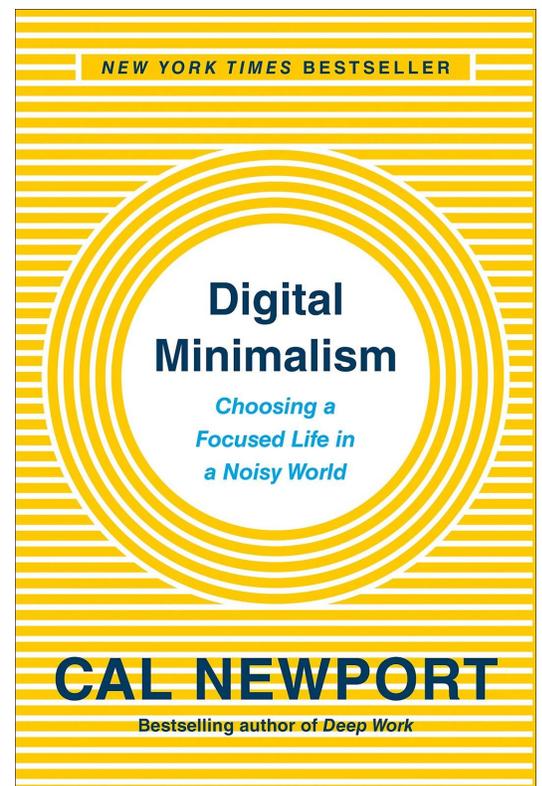
The following is inspired and drawn from the book *Digital Minimalism* by Cal Newport. Borrow or purchase the book to dive deeper into the context and guide below. Consider sharing this journey as a family or small group with others.

1. Where are you going?

Jesus entered the wilderness with a purpose: to prepare for a public ministry of preaching, healing, forgiving, and sacrifice.

We are not meant to serve our screens. Our screens are meant to serve the life God calls us to live.

Digital Minimalism: *A philosophy of technology use in which you focus your online time on a small number of carefully selected and optimized activities that strongly support things you value, and then happily miss out on everything else.*



“Simply put, humans are not wired to be constantly wired.”

- Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism*

2. It takes 40 days...

Fast (take a temporary break) from **all** optional technologies like Facebook, Twitter, Texting, YouTube, and/or Netflix--anything you get through a screen (TV, phone, tablet, watch).

This is not a momentary “detox” but an intentional fast--Newport calls it a *declutter*--to “clear away the distracting tools and compulsive habits that may have accumulated haphazardly over time” (pg. 60).

Optional means that the technology would not **harm** personal or professional life. Work email is likely not optional (though using it at home likely is), whereas Instagram is probably optional (unless you are the marketer for a company).

You need a lengthy break to reset. Otherwise, you’ll go right back to your default behaviors and conditioned reactions to carefully crafted digital attractions.

Lent provides a unique opportunity to...

1. **See how it’s all connected:** your digital behaviors are intimately connected to your spiritual capacity for love, patience, attention, and listening
2. **Experience the “self-emptying” of Christ** in our digitally-dominated world
3. **Be in community:** you are not alone on the shared journey of Lent toward the new life Easter promises. Not is Jesus on the journey with you, but others are practicing Lent, too. Consider the “shared fast” below.

Shared fast: Embark on this 40 day fast with a partner, spouse, as a family, or in a small group. Doing this in community can create a unique kind of connection, accountability, and shared encouragement. Some practices can be shared in the family or small group, especially when you are together (say, turning off phones or placing in a set apart location).

Set scheduled times to gather and check in, talk about what you are learning, what you are struggling with, what God is revealing to you.

3. Write it down...

Specificity and commitment matter.

Determine the list of “fasted technologies” you will not use. You might eliminate some screens altogether (no TV) and/or specific tools on a screen (no Netflix, no Facebook, etc).

Determine the list of technologies you will only use under very specific conditions.

For example, only use work email *at work* or *during the work day*. If people need to reach you for a work emergency, let them know how to do so (phone call). To protect yourself from yourself, when you get home disable your work inbox on your smartphone and/or deposit your smartphone somewhere while at home (like a living room or foyer table, kitchen, etc).

Check out the form on **page 8** and more examples on **page 11**.

“A digital fast without a digital discipline makes virtually no difference.”

- Michael Swartzentruber, Senior Minister

4. Replace, replace, replace

During this fast, “explore and rediscover activities and behaviors that you find satisfying and meaningful” (pg. 60).

"**Figuring this out before you begin** reintroducing technology at the end of this declutter process is crucial," Newport clarifies. "You're more likely to succeed in reducing the role of digital tools in your life if you cultivate high-quality alternatives to the easy distraction they provide" (pg. 71).

IDEAS

1. Spend Time Alone

Solitude deprivation: “A state in which you spend close to zero time alone with your own thoughts and free from input from other minds” (p. 103)

Because of technology and entertainment options increasingly available and always with us at our fingertips...

“It’s now possible to completely banish solitude from your life. Thoreau and Storr worried about people enjoying less solitude. We must now wonder if people might forget this state of being altogether.”

- Cal Newport, pg 101

You don’t have to be bored or alone with your thoughts in line at the supermarket. You can browse Facebook on your phone. You don’t have to sit quietly in the car line picking up your kid, you can listen to the news on the radio or catch up on a podcast.

Yet it is solitude that we need, and not just for our spirits. Solitude, time without the influence of other minds (including books, podcasts, shows, etc), is crucial for your brain to process and regulate complex emotions.

Solitude Ideas

Take long walks in the neighborhood

Meditate

Hike in the countryside

Exercise without earbuds

Journal

Leave your phone in the car (or at home)

Stand/park/be in line without trying to occupy yourself with something

2. Cultivate Conversation

Batch “shallow” communication. Answer emails, texts at set times during the day at specific time(s). Don’t constantly reply to every incoming message.

Communication is *shallow* when it doesn’t allow our socially-fine-tuned brains to engage and interpret the richness of voice tone, facial expression, body posture, and other non-verbal aspects of communication. Texts, emails, and posts cut off those subtle dimensions of communication. Phone calls, video calls, and in-person conversation are *deep* because they carry more communication signals, which our brains are calibrated to seek.

Focus on a relationship and schedule time to talk in person, over the phone, or via FaceTime. Eliminate distractions to give full and complete attention.

3. Reclaim Leisure

“The premise of this chapter is that by cultivating a high-quality leisure life first, it will become easier to minimize low-quality digital diversions later.”

Cal Newport, pg 200

Engage in a craft: “any activity where you apply skill to create something valuable” (pg. 177)

Cook dinner and/or have a dinner party

Paint

Build something new

Play an instrument

Fix something that is broken

Sew, quilt, or crochet

Play a board game or cards

Schedule your leisure so you prioritize and protect it. Don't just expect it to happen.

Schedule “low quality leisure” to put limits on things that could easily creep in and dominate your life (like a Netflix or Television show you watch by yourself).

“The most successful social leisure activities share two traits. First, they require you to spend time with other people in person...the second trait is that the activity provides some sort of structure for the social interaction, including rules to have to follow, insider terminology or rituals, and often a shared goal” (pg. 189).

4. Reignite your Spirit

Read scripture and journal your thoughts

Join a Sunday School or small group

Research and/or begin a spiritual practice like...

Lectio Divina

Ignatian Examen

See the **Lent Guide** for more ideas, hardcopies available at South Elkhorn or online at southelkhorncc.org/lent

4. Return

“At the end of the fast, reintroduce optional technologies into your life, starting from a blank slate. For each technology you reintroduce, determine what value it serves in your life and how specifically you will use it so as to maximize this value” (pg. 60).

For many, these optional technologies and thoughtless habits of scrolling, binging, or checking will have lost their luster. New habits and a more meaningful life will have emerged to grown roots that can blossom.

Develop intentional protocols for how you use any of the technologies you choose to use again. Don't just jump back into them, use them *intentionally*.

DIGITAL FAST

Fasted Technologies - what will be deleted from a phone or refrained from using at all:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Technologies used only under certain conditions:

1. _____

Under the following conditions: _____

2. _____

Under the following conditions: _____

3. _____

Under the following conditions: _____

Hobbies or activities to (re)start:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Spiritual practice to cultivate:

1. _____ every _____ at _____
2. _____ every _____ at _____

Relationships to grow:

1. _____
by: _____

2. _____
by: _____

3. _____
by: _____

What I/we learned from the Lenten Fast?

New Rules for my/our digital life:

DIGITAL FAST example

Fasted Technologies - what will be deleted from a phone or refrained from using at all:

1. Delete Non-Work related social media apps from phone_____
2. Delete all news apps from phone_____
3. Remove extended family text message group_____

Technologies used only under certain conditions:

1. Netflix_____

Under the following conditions: no more than 1 show at a time--no binging.

2. Phone_____

Under the following conditions: stays put on foyer table when I come home from work. Leave phone in car (or in pocket) when at a restaurant or store, practice *not* looking at phone while waiting in line. Keep off table and out of view during meetings, conversations, and social interactions._____

3. Digital Watch_____

Under the following conditions: Go analog for all occasions except exercise. Only use digital watch _____ for _____ exercise purposes._____

4. Work Email_____

Under the following conditions: set up apple inbox to only show personal email inbox on days off. Communicate to work how to reach me in emergency situations (phone call)._____