

ENDING THE ELECTRONIC FAST

Forty days ago (was it a decade?) as a church family we together set out on a journey to fast from personal consumption of electronics. We knew this was going to be challenging but there is not one of us who knew how much things would change in our homes and across the world.

The elders believe that God wants us to grow in actively eliminating hurry from our lives. Hurry is one of the greatest enemies to enjoying the life that God has for us. We know that we live in a fast-paced world, and that many of us have been overly attached, connected and maybe even addicted to the false illusion of eternity in our pockets. Whether it be entertainment, news, social media, games or other forms of learning, we've realized there isn't a minute of our day that our phones, tablets, computers or gaming devices wouldn't gladly receive our attention and affection. The problem is our phones, tablets, computers and gaming devices are things and not a person. We've never been created to be in relationship with things, we've been created to be in relationship with God and with people (1 John 1:1-4).

Our hope through this fast was multifaceted.

First, we wanted to realize that if we eliminate or limit unnecessary personal electronic consumption in our life, it creates a greater opportunity for true connection with God and others. I often hear folks saying they don't engage with God in his word because they are too busy. The fast has helped eliminate that to some degree, and I know many who have been engaging with God and his word more in these last 40 days than ever before. We have also engaged more with one another; I know for our family, our connection increased tremendously. It still takes intentionality, however, unrushed conversation opened up exponentially as we weren't quickly finishing dinner so we could watch a show or squeeze in one more thing.

Second, we wanted to recognize our unhealthy dependence on a thing rather than God. This has been quite revealing. Most of us, whether or not we want to admit it, have become overly dependent on a thing. Everyone knows codependence with another person is unhealthy, but for some reason, we accept over-attachment to our devices. Think about it, when you're standing in line at the grocery store and it's taking too long what do you do? When you get into an elevator what do you reach for? What's the first thing you reach for in the morning (whether intentionally or not)? Your alarm? Which is what? Probably your phone. And then you look for those little red notifications and all of a sudden your phone, rather than time with God, has started your day. Matthew 6:33 has been running through my brain: "But seek first HIS Kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you as well." This is a command to start our day with him and continue to be about his purposes throughout the day. However, if we miss out

on starting with him, the likelihood of us consciously being about his work and his kingdom becomes increasingly more difficult as the day goes on.

During this fast, many of us--myself included--have been forced to look at these habits. To be honest, I haven't liked some of my behaviors. I've been in the queue at the grocery store and I got rid of any apps on my phone that should draw my attention. No news, no social media, no coupons, and I still reach for my phone to hope that someone has texted me, but more often than not I open my phone, click on a few different things almost pretending to be occupied, and then put my phone away. I move another 6 feet closer to the registrar and then do it again. Others of us have been faced with more alone time with ourselves and recognized that we use our phones or tablets as a coping mechanism to not be alone with God and others. I know even before the fast started the Lord was convicting me of this. My phone, this device, this thing, was often promising me connection and fulfillment. In reality, it was robbing God, my wife, my children, and my friends of my attention, presence, and affection.

Part of our hope during this fast is that it would provide the opportunity for us all to consider the patterns of our life, and to see if they line up with a desire to follow Jesus so that we might share his life and love with those around us.

These were some of the desires we had going into the fast, without the slightest thought of the global pandemic of COVID-19. I fully believe our electronic fast helped prepare us for this time. It gave us an opportunity to be more present with God, to be reminded that he is who we need more than anything else. It provided an opportunity for some to be alone with God more than they have ever been. For many of us, we intentionally slowed down, and were able to place our anxious hearts in the hand of our great redeemer. The relational development that took place in those two weeks before COVID were a gracious gift from God that allowed us to approach this incredibly tragic season differently than we might have without the fast. Everything going on with COVID is so sad, and our hearts are filled with grief as nearly every country in the world is now experiencing loss, pain, suffering and economic challenges. But in spite of current appearance and circumstance, God is in control.

It seems that in this unique time there is a gracious opportunity to rethink, reshape, and for some, even repurpose our lives. Even in the midst of pain and fear of the unknown, we get to remember that God wastes nothing (Romans 8:28). What is God doing in you? How is he giving you the opportunity to set up rhythms of life consistent with a life of following Jesus? As our fast comes to a close, take time in the next week or two to prayerfully plan out the habits that you want to be true in your life, and begin to put them into practice. If you're looking for a good place to start we will have a framework for you to consider following coming out during the week. Would we not waste the fast, or waste the season that we find ourselves in during this time.

Nicole Raden has put together an electronic re-engagement worksheet to help decide how to appropriately and intentionally engage with electronics. Take time this week to go through it, and make a plan so that we don't find ourselves in the same boat we were in 40 days ago. We love

5. What has this experience highlighted for you in your walk with Jesus? What have you learned about Him or about yourself?

RE-ENGAGING WITH ELECTRONICS

Identify your top 3-5 items you fasted from, ideally the ones that previously you used the most heavily and/or were the hardest to cut out. Look at each item independently to consider how (and if) you want to re-engage with this form of technology.

Item #1: _____	
Rate your experience with this tech item before the fast by placing an X on the following scales	
Time spent using item 1 - - - - - 10	
<i>(Healthy amount of time spent)</i>	<i>(Obsessive amount of time spent)</i>
Reasons for using item 1 - - - - - 10	
<i>(Generally healthy, Life-giving, Enjoyable)</i>	<i>(Mostly unhealthy, Anxiety-inducing, Unhappy)</i>
Do you want to re-engage with this technology item in the same way as before, or are there adjustments you want/need to make to your habits or practices? Describe below.	

Item #2: _____	
Rate your experience with this tech item before the fast by placing an X on the following scales	
Time spent using item 1-----10	
<i>(Healthy amount of time spent)</i>	<i>(Obsessive amount of time spent)</i>
Reasons for using item 1-----10	
<i>(Generally healthy, Life-giving, Enjoyable)</i>	<i>(Mostly unhealthy, Anxiety-inducing, Unhappy)</i>
Do you want to re-engage with this technology item in the same way as before, or are there adjustments you want/need to make to your habits or practices? Describe below.	

Item #3: _____	
Rate your experience with this tech item before the fast by placing an X on the following scales	
Time spent using item 1-----10	
<i>(Healthy amount of time spent)</i>	<i>(Obsessive amount of time spent)</i>
Reasons for using item 1-----10	
<i>(Generally healthy, Life-giving, Enjoyable)</i>	<i>(Mostly unhealthy, Anxiety-inducing, Unhappy)</i>

Do you want to re-engage with this technology item **in the same way** as before, or are there adjustments you want/need to make to your habits or practices? Describe below.

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Item #4: _____

Rate your experience with this tech item **before** the fast by placing an X on the following scales

Time spent using 1-----10
item

*(Healthy amount
of time spent)*

*(Obsessive amount of
time spent)*

Reasons for using 1-----10
item

*(Generally healthy,
Life-giving, Enjoyable)*

*(Mostly unhealthy,
Anxiety-inducing,
Unhappy)*

Do you want to re-engage with this technology item **in the same way** as before, or are there adjustments you want/need to make to your habits or practices? Describe below.

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Item #5: _____

Rate your experience with this tech item **before** the fast by placing an X on the following scales

Time spent using 1-----10
item

*(Healthy amount
of time spent)*

*(Obsessive amount of
time spent)*

Reasons for using 1 ----- 10 item
<i>(Generally healthy, Life-giving, Enjoyable)</i> <i>(Mostly unhealthy, Anxiety-inducing, Unhappy)</i>
Do you want to re-engage with this technology item in the same way as before, or are there adjustments you want/need to make to your habits or practices? Describe below.