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Pondering the Presence of the Smartphone

The Devotion of the Heart and Distraction of the Eyes

Scripture: Prov. 4:20-27

Sermon Series: *Pondering the Presence of the Smartphone*

Topic: Technology



Proverbs 4:20-27 (ESV)

²⁰ My son, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.

²¹ Let them not escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.

²² For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.

²³ Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.

²⁴ Put away from you crooked speech,
and put devious talk far from you.

²⁵ Let your eyes look directly forward,

and your gaze be straight before you.

²⁶ Ponder the path of your feet;

then all your ways will be sure.

²⁷ Do not swerve to the right or to the left;

turn your foot away from evil.

Introduction

God graciously gave King Solomon such an abundance of wisdom that no one before or after him has ever been wiser. He was the wisest man who has ever lived.¹ Apparently Solomon was granted wisdom about everything under the sun, for he spoke on every topic from fish to fir trees.² Lately the topic of smartphones has been on my mind so I wondered if Solomon would have any wisdom to share with us on the topic of smartphones.

Of course Solomon lived not a few days before the introduction of the smartphone, but Peter said that God has given us “everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). So, if that’s true, then surely there must be some place (or several places) in God’s word where He has given us principles to help us handle technology in godly and life-giving ways. The need for biblical instruction on this topic grows daily since the presence of smartphones are increasingly ubiquitous.

The iPhone Turns 12 Next Month

The smartphone is relatively new on the human technological horizon. The smartphone was made possible only because of the reality of the internet, which first came online in 1989. It is amazing to think that the internet is only 20 years old.

The birth of the smartphone was ushered in with the birth of the iPhone. Next month marks its twelfth birthday. Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone to the world at the Macworld Expo on January 9, 2007 and then Apple shipped them to stores on June 29, 2007.³

The first year they went on sale, Apple sold a little over one million iPhones. In the 2017 fiscal year, alone, they sold just over 216 million iPhones. From 2007 to 2017 Apple has sold 1.2 billion smartphones. That’s equivalent to one seventh of the entire population of the world. When you add all other manufacturers, the total number of smartphones users today is just under 3 billion. That means that a little less than half of all persons alive today own a smartphone.

This is reality worth pondering.

¹ 1 Kings 3:12.

² 1 Kings 4:29-34.

³ Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), Apple Books, 14.

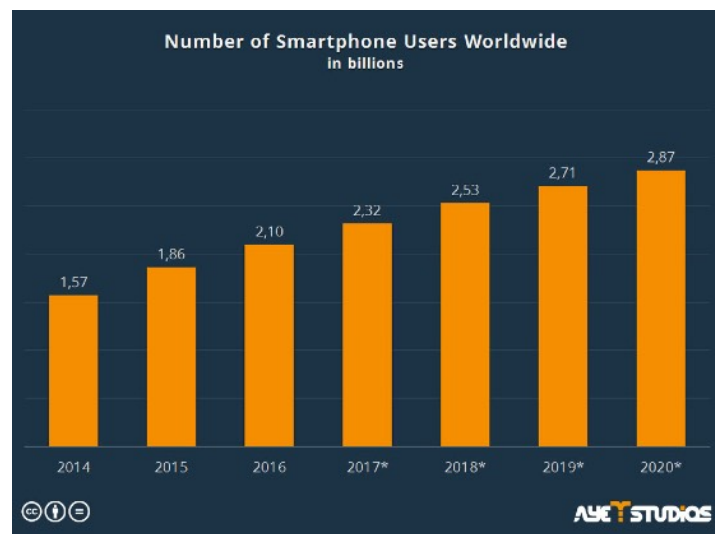
A little over a decade ago no one owned a smartphone. Today almost half the people on the planet own one. This is the first time in the history of humanity that most of us carry in our pockets a little device that has “thirty thousand times the processing speed of the seventy-pound onboard navigational computer that guided Apollo 11 to the surface of the moon.”⁴

This smart device provides us with almost unlimited access to other people and information. “TIME magazine named the iPhone the single most influential gadget of all time, saying that it ‘fundamentally changed our relationship to computing and information—a change likely to have repercussions for decades to come.’”⁵ Indeed, the smartphone has changed the way we relate to information, but it’s also changed how we relate to each other.

This is worth pondering.

Furthermore, the smartphone is worth pondering because it is with us nearly every moment of the day. Research among 18-29 year-olds in the U.S. reveals that 86% of them own a smartphone and 36% of them report that they are “online almost constantly.”⁶ This is not hard to understand. We do almost

everything with our smartphones. We sleep with it and wake up with it. We fall asleep playing Candy Crush on our smartphones and wake up with the alarm on our smartphones. The smartphone is our deejay—playing our music, our personal assistant, creating calendar events and even composing email and text messages for us. It’s our librarian, our entertainer, our counselor, and our scribe. With it we learn, laugh, look, listen, like, and love. It is with us at work and at play. We shop from it and even use it to get a ride to the airport and follow the bus schedule. And without it we can talk to no one. I used to have memorized every phone number of every friend I had. Today, I know not one of them. If I lost my phone today, I could only call two people—my mom (because she’s had the same phone number since I was 2 years old) and my wife. If you want to stay connected, then you must have our phone with you at all times.



The effects of this are definitely worth pondering.

⁴ Reinke, *12 Ways*, 44.

⁵ Reinke, *12 Ways*, 15.

⁶ Reinke, *12 Ways*, 33.

For the majority of us, this new device is with us nearly all the time. How should we think biblically about it?

What does God think about smartphones?

If Jesus was starting up his middle-eastern ministry today, would he have a smartphone?

Does this old book, the Holy Bible, offer us any wisdom on how to walk wisely through a new digital world?

If God gave Solomon wisdom like no other man, then maybe he has some helpful advice. Let's give our attention to Proverbs chapter four, verses 20-27.

Exposition: Proverbs 4:20-27

The Wisdom of Solomon's Words (v.20-22)

In these seven verses, Solomon is offering wisdom to his son. He shares his wisdom because he knows it can bring benefits and blessings if his son will listen to the message. A wise son will pay attention to the experienced words of a wise and loving father. Only a foolish son will ignore the good advice of a loving and caring parent.

Proverbs 4:20-22 (ESV)

²⁰ My son, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.

²¹ Let them not escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.

²² For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.

Solomon desires to pass on to his son, **words** and **sayings**. He yearns for him to be **attentive** to what he has to say. He calls for his son's mental attention. He wants his mind to engage with the wisdom of his words. He invites him to **incline** his ear to his words. He is inviting his son to lean in and listen to him. He has a *message* that will bring blessing to his son if only his son will turn his full attention to the truth he is sharing with him. So he pleads with him,

Proverbs 4:21

Let them not let escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.

Solomon wants his son to see his words. He wants him to visualize them. This desire is probably one of the reasons behind why he writes this down. He likely knows the short attention span of his son, so he not only speaks this wisdom in his ears, but he also writes it down so his son can return to it. He wants him to capture a mental image of these words so that he will not lose the blessing they hold.

The Eyes Are the Doorway Into the Heart

Notice the connection between the eyes and the heart. First he says, "*don't let them escape your sight,*" then he instructs him to "*keep them within your heart.*" Solomon knows that what you see with your eyes is what you will treasure in your heart. Everyone knows this. *What we behold with our eyes determines what we desire in our hearts.* The longer something lingers before you eyes, the more you desire it.

Every company knows this. This is why companies happily paid \$5.3 million for a 30 second ad during this year's Super Bowl. If they can keep your eyes on something beautiful that they're selling for 30 seconds or a minute, tell you its what you desire, and then show you were you can go find it, they know you're likely to do it. This is one reason why we should ponder carefully the little phones we hold before our eyes. **The eyes are the doorway into the heart.**

Solomon wants his words and sayings to stand still before the eyes of his son, and linger in his ears, so that his words will be *treasured* in his son's heart. He commands his son, "***keep them within your heart.***" The word 'keep' means "to watch over alertly," like a shepherd watching over a flock of sheep by night, or a gardener watching over his garden, or a like a night-watchman watching over the walls and gates of his city.⁷ The call here is for active protection of the doorway to the soul. There are spiritual realities at stake here and Solomon is calling his son to treasure his words down to the bottom of his being and to cherish his truth to the very core of his soul.

Why? Because life and death are at stake.

Proverbs 4:22

For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.

The words and saying that Solomon intends to share, can bring **life** and **healing**. This is what the word of God is! It is life and health to all who heed it. This is exactly what Moses said.

Deuteronomy 32:46-47 (ESV)

"...be careful to do all the words of this law, for it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land..."

⁷ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1036.

Abiding in and by God's word is the means by which He brings life and healing to us.⁸ Jesus affirmed the same truth during his days on earth.

John 6:63 (ESV)

"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

The message of the gospel of Jesus carries the promise of spiritual life, eternal life. The power of God's word can cause worlds to come into existence⁹ and can raise the dead.¹⁰ Solomon knows this and thus he yearns for his son to receive the words of God into his heart, down into the depths of his being. Solomon is not calling for his son merely to give lip-service to God's word. He is calling him to cherish God's word like it is the most valuable possession he has, because that's exactly what it is.

Heart: The Locus of the Logos & the Springs of Life (v.23-25)

This truth is so important that he essentially repeats it, while adding more color and only slightly shifting the focus. In verse 21 what is to be 'kept' are the words and their message. Then in verse 23 he repeats the word 'keep,'¹¹ but now what is to be 'kept' is the heart—the *locus* of the *logos*, or the location of the words. In other words, since the 'heart' is the place where the words are to be treasured, then guarding the words similarly means guarding the heart. Both the words and the place of treasuring those words are to be guarded and protected.

The reason why this is so important is because *it is from the heart that the entire direction of one's life springs out, is set and determined.*

Proverbs 4:23-25 (ESV)

²³ Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.

²⁴ Put away from you crooked speech,
and put devious talk far from you.

²⁵ Let your eyes look directly forward,
and your gaze be straight before you.

He, of course, is not here talking about the cardiac muscle. Rather, he is referring to the core of one's being, or the center of the self. A better translation for us may be the word mind. It refers to the place from which we exercise our will and emotions. The word '**heart**' is "the

⁸ It is by trusting in LORD and refusing to trust in ourself and turning away from evil that we find "healing for our flesh and refreshment for our bones" (Prov. 3:5-8).

⁹ Genesis 1.

¹⁰ John 11:40-44.

¹¹ Though, in the Hebrew, two different words are used, they are synonyms.

richest biblical term for the totality of man's inner or immaterial nature."¹² The heart is the place of one's emotional attachments. It is the base of operations of our affections. The heart is the logic board of the soul. The heart runs the software that responds to the touchscreen of your life. Therefore, "keep it with all vigilance."

Solomon adds the word '*vigilance*.' The word refers to a protective watch throughout the night, like a guard watching over a prisoner.¹³ The point here is to be on heightened alert at a time when you are most vulnerable. Solomon is calling his son to prepare in advance to protect his heart when he knows he may be most susceptible to the subtleties of the enemy.

Why? Because "*from the heart flow the springs of life.*" The direction of your life is determined by the desires of your heart. The entire course of life springs out from the affections of the heart. If you allow the affections of your heart to attach to sinful things, then the course of your life will be marked by misery and sadness that always accompanies sin. Solomon does not want this sadness for his son, thus he warns him.

Two Ways to Guard Your Heart

So how does one vigilantly guard the affections of the heart? Solomon mentions two ways. First, by guarding your tongue (v.24) and second, by guarding your eyes (v.25).

1) Guard Your Tongue

The first way to guard the heart is by guarding the tongue. Solomon calls for his son to,

Proverbs 4:24

Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.

Part of protecting your heart from faulty attachments is avoiding faulty speech. If you speak only the truth, then you will develop an affection for the truth and disaffection for twisting the truth. However, if your speaking involves persistently twisting the truth, then your heart will become intractably entangled in lies and deception. This will bring destruction into your life. Jesus warned of this truth.

Matthew 12:34-37 (ESV)

³⁴ For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. ³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

¹² Andrew Bowling, "[לֵב 1071](#)," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 466.

¹³ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 1038.

Jesus here connects the eternal destiny of the soul with the desires of the heart. The desires of the heart are revealed by the words of the tongue. Spoken words flow out from the inner heart. If you want to know the true condition of your heart, then listen to the words that come out of your mouth. Solomon's words are wise and true. If you want to guard your heart, then keep crooked speech and devious talk far from you.

2) Guard Your Eyes

The second way to guard the heart is by guarding the eyes. Solomon calls for his son to,

Proverbs 4:25

Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.

Solomon warns against allowing the eyes to wander. Keep your eyes fixed forward and your gaze on where you should be going. When the eyes turn aside to look at distracting things, that's when a person will stumble and fall. Solomon knew this all too well.

1 Kings 11:4 (NIV)

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

God wants the hearts of His children to be fully devoted to him and thus He warns against anything that tends to dilute that devotion, such as, in this case, marrying an unbeliever. Solomon married many unbelieving women. And in his desire to please his unbelieving wives, he allowed them each to set up idols of their own gods.¹⁴ He even built temples for some of them in which to worship their false gods. The continual presence of these idols before his eyes had devastating effects on the devotion of his heart. The effect was that his heart was turned away from LORD his God. His devotion to LORD his God was diluted by the presence of idols before his eyes.

Why?

Because that which is beheld in the eyes is adored in the heart. The affections of the heart follow the attentions of the eyes. Job knew this.

Job 31:7 (ESV)

if my step has turned aside from the way
and my heart has gone after my eyes,

Job was here defending himself against the accusations of his so-called "friends." Job was fully aware of the tendency of the "*heart to go after the eyes.*" When the eyes become distracted, the heart soon follows their gaze. The persistent object before the eyes will

¹⁴ 1 Kings 11:5-8.

become the devotion of the heart. Therefore, if we are to successfully guard our hearts, then we must first vigilantly guard our eyes. Since we go after, in our hearts, that which is before our eyes, then we must ponder what we watch.

The way of wisdom (v.26-27)

In the final two verses, Solomon calls for this kind of protracted thinking.

Proverbs 4:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ Ponder the path of your feet;
then all your ways will be sure.

²⁷ Do not swerve to the right or to the left;
turn your foot away from evil.

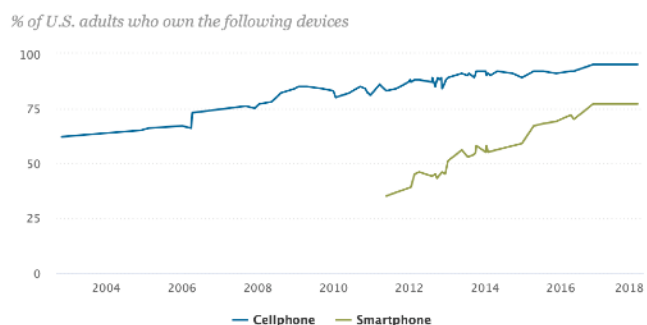
To '*ponder the path of your feet,*' means to give serious thought to the direction of your life. If you have the NIV, it translates this "make level paths for your feet." The word means "to weigh (i.e. to carefully consider), to make level and smooth."¹⁵ Essentially the word calls us to sit down and think carefully about the direction of our lives, clear away all the bumps, and fill in all the pot holes that might trip us up on our way to communion, fellowship, and friendship with our Creator and His only Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus.¹⁶

In summery, ponder the path of your life and don't allow anything to keep you from Jesus. Fix your gaze on Him and do not swerve from Him to the right or to the left. If you keep your eyes on Him, then your life will be sure and steady.

Conclusion

As I ponder the path of our lives, digital technology is increasingly a part of it. We are spending more and more time on our smartphones.

As of 2018, according to pewinternet.org, 95% of Americans own a cellphone, while 77% own a smartphone.¹⁷



The amount of time we spend on our smart phones continues to rise.

¹⁵ James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon* (Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1995).

¹⁶ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

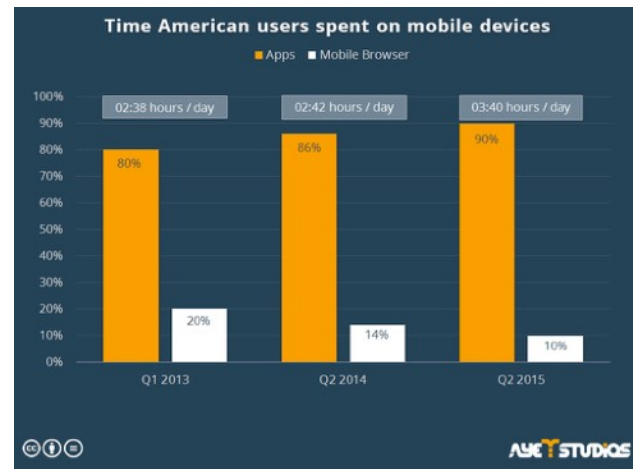
¹⁷ Source: <https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/> accessed 24 May 2019.

In 2013 the average American spent 2.38 hours per day on a smartphone.

By 2015 that had risen to 3.40 hours per day.

In 2019, according to inc.com, the average American is spending over 4 hours per day looking at the screen of a device.¹⁸

If the affections of our hearts go after the objects before our eyes, then we must seriously ponder the presence of smartphones in our lives.



Like any piece of technology, the smartphone can be used for good or ill. Smartphones are not inherently evil. I have been immensely blessed by the use of my phone.

- I read the news from around the world and stay informed on international events.
- I can call any member of my family no matter where they are.
- I can listen to my favorite preachers with a couple of taps of my finger.
- I can listen to almost any song I want (including the old Keith Green songs which I could never afford to buy on tape).
- I can send an instant message to anyone.
- I can get in touch with old friends from high school.
- I can connect with hundreds even thousands of people.
- I can read my Bible and maintain my daily reading plan.
- I can photograph and video almost anything.

Smartphones are a brilliant blessing for which I praise God, but they can also bring bewildering burdens.

- I can read the news from around the world... and watch the increase of human depravity and sin.
- I can call any member of my family, but how does it make them feel when I don't?
- I can listen to any preacher I want, so why do I need to go to church?
- I can listen to any song I want, but the most popular songs celebrate sin, so should I really be filling my mind with the things God hates?

¹⁸ Source: <https://www.inc.com/melanie-curtin/are-you-on-your-phone-too-much-average-person-spends-this-many-hours-on-it-every-day.html> accessed 24 May 2019.

- I can send and instant messages... and sometimes those quick, thoughtless messages can do irreparable emotional harm.
- I can get in touch with old high school friends... and marriages have been destroyed because of reignited old flames and flirtatious fiascos made possible by Facebook.
- I can connect with hundreds and thousands of "friends" but... none of them truly know me and so I might (and many people do) feel more isolated and alone than ever.
- I can read my Bible... but after reading Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter it's just flat out boring because I've trained myself to limit my attention space to no longer than 2.5 minutes.
- I can photograph and video pretty much anything... anything, and I can see any photograph or video.

There is a battle for the devotion of your heart. There is a fight for the affections of your soul. Whatever holds the attention of your eyes will soon command the devotion of your heart. Because of this truth, we must ponder the presence of smartphones in our lives.

There are words and sayings that bring life. There is a gospel message that can save your soul. This good news is that Jesus lived a holy life, died an atoning death, experienced a victorious resurrection and then a glorious ascension into heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of God. This message needs to be taken to ends of the earth, to every people group on the planet. The smartphone can either help us accomplish this mission or distract us from it.

Jesus desires the full, undivided devotion of your heart. The devotion of our hearts has everything to do with the attention of our eyes. Therefore, we must guard our hearts and our eyes with all vigilance. The direction of our lives is set by the affections of our hearts. We must ponder the things that we set before our eyes.

May we allow nothing to dilute the devotion of our hearts away from the Savior of our Souls. May our smartphones be nothing but tools in our hands to help fan the flames of our devotion to Jesus.