

Three Reasons a Social Media Fast Might Be Good For You

A social media fast is not just about pressing pause. It is also about hitting play—to be free to use the time, treasures, and talents God has given you.

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The kids are in bed and my husband is in late-night meetings with colleagues from the other side of the world. For that signals it is time to pick up my phone for some easy entertainment before I turn in for the night.

But as I scroll through Instagram, what I thought would be a carefree diversion turns into an obsessive consumption of content. In the span of a few minutes, it siphons me off into a world which is convincingly real even though it is virtual.

In this alternate reality, an avatar of me emerges that I do not quite like—I find myself giving into jealousy over someone’s online platform, casting judgment on opinions different from mine, feeling insecure about my appearance and growing dissatisfied with my ‘boring’ life.

Every few swipes, the app also offers me compelling “Shop Now” links that seem to know exactly what products I “need” to quell the discontent fermenting inside me.

My harmless entertainment turns out to be mind-numbingly exhausting. Instead of reading the book on my nightstand or writing in my prayer journal, I am overstimulated from the flurry of memes, quotes, reels, and e-commerce rabbit holes.

I close my heavy eyes and sleep fitfully for fewer hours than I had planned.

Perhaps this pattern sounds familiar to you—a scenario where the glare of screens lulls you to sleep.

With more than 21 crore Instagram users and 41 crore Facebook users in India today, I would venture to say I am isolated in experiencing this sort of mental and physical fatigue from scrolling through social media.

It is little wonder that I find myself needing to step away from screens—specifically addictive social media screens—every now and then.

Why I Take a Social Media Fast

For the last few years, I have gone cold turkey with Facebook and Instagram primarily because of the exhaustion I have just described. Sometimes, it has been a 48-hour fast, and at other times, I have deleted those apps for 40 days or so, typically during Lent.

Some may deem this sort of discipline to be extreme and unnecessary. It is not something that Scriptures prescribe to do. So, why “fast” from social media?

As believers we have been given the holy mandate to honour God with our time and resources. Stepping away from social media for a period of time can help us consider our ways (Hag. 1:5) and probe our hearts (Lam. 3:40).

Of course, as a writer who posts regularly on Instagram, I worry that breaking up with social media will ruin my chances for “organic growth.”

I deliberate whether the nebulous and often-maligned algorithm will sense my inactivity and cast me into social media oblivion.

“When we pull the brakes on social media, we open the door to the treasure of time.”

With several social media fasts under my belt, I can vouch that algorithms are smart enough to know when you are inconsistent with your engagement and heartless enough to give you the boot.

But, I also know that the more I worry about whether my followers will forget me or my “brand” will crumble, the greater my need to draw strict boundaries around my social media interaction.

While fasting from social media may not be for everyone, it is something I need to do regularly to reset my focus and reprioritise my affections.

A Social Media Fast Reveals Our Idolatry

As human beings, we are hardwired with a desire to feel like we matter. But instead of drawing our significance from what Christ has accomplished for us, we tend to look around us for affirmations from the world.

With its instant endorsement in the form of thumbs-ups, heart emojis and smiley faces, social media stokes that sense of validation far too easily.

But when, through fasting, we distance ourselves from that false sense of worth, we begin to see just how flimsy it is and we grasp our infinitely superior worth in Christ.

Fasting from social media gives us the detachment required to evaluate whether Instagram, Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn (an app that is usually given a free pass because it is deemed more serious) have become idols that displace God to give us a false sense of significance.

A Social Media Fast Frees Us for Good Works

If the heart-idol argument seems too philosophical, few can argue that social media robs us of the finite, valuable, God-given gift of time.

“In today’s culture we tend to document, curate, and share moments from our lives even before we fully experience them.”

The “I’ll just check Facebook for five minutes” myth is laughable at best, not just because we tend to be forgetful and undisciplined but because billions of dollars have been invested to ensure these apps are addictive.

Once the app is open, there’s little you and I can do to dodge the dopamine that keeps us hooked and coming back for more.

When we pull the brakes on social media, we open the door to the treasure of time.

Without time we cannot do the good works that God has already prepared in advance for us to do. It is really that simple.

Fasting from social media is not just about pressing pause. It is also about hitting play. Then you can best use the treasures, and talents God has invested in you.

A Social Media Fast Gives Us the Opportunity to Enjoy the Present

In today's culture we tend to document, curate, and share moments from our lives even before we fully experience them.

When a server at a restaurant sets down a dish, the overwhelming majority of us grab our phones to take pictures from different angles for our social media feeds. We are often more consumed with our feeds than our actual food.

But fasting from social media relieves us from the narrowness of finding joy only in filtering our experiences for virtual audiences.

We are freed to enjoy the moment, to be fully present and to express gratitude to God for the here and now.

Stepping away from screens for a specified period of time has become a regular rhythm in my life. It is not just “good for my soul” to detox, but it is also a step of obedience which compels me to examine how I use my time and where my worship lies.

That may leave you with the question: “Should I consider a social media fast?” May I suggest that if you find yourself dismissing the idea too quickly, then perhaps scrolling has more of a grip on you than you think.

If you believe that stepping away from social media can prove helpful, perhaps you can start small. Take a social-media-free Sabbath or a device-free weekend.

Use that intentional break to be still before God. Lean into him for affirmation and worth. Pray about how you can receive the gift of time to honour God. Ask him to redeem your attention and your affections.

Social media is a good thing, a useful thing that helps us connect with others. But, to quote Tim Keller, may it not become the “ultimate thing” that disconnects us from God.

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