

Back to the Altar

100 DAYS OF PRAYER

FOR THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

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Distracted

by Dwain Esmond



It was during the summer before my third year of high school—a school with all the attendant ills of violence, drugs, sexual immorality, etc.—that my parents decided I needed a change of scenery, and for good reason. I have always had a “thing” for words and language. I excelled in any subject that involved English or writing, and this started at an early age for me. So, when Hip Hop music burst onto the American music scene in the late 80s and 90s, I was hooked. I overdosed on the Hip Hop groups of the day. Add to the music a hot new dance craze called Breakdancing, and I was doubly hooked. It was fresh. It was urban. It was me.

If by beholding we become changed, as Ellen White wrote in many places of her writings (*MS 4, 1897; MS 148, 1897; MS 117, 1899; MS 102, 1901; and more*), this was definitely true of me. I had been changed by what I was pumping into my ears and setting before my face (Ps 101:3). By the time I reached high school I was “rappin” in a small group, breakdancing with my friends, and dreaming of pop stardom. I went to church with my parents, participated actively in Pathfinders and Adventist Youth Society (AYS), but I was losing my way. I was distracted and completely off course from where God wanted me to be.

My parents shipped me off to Adventist boarding school far away from the city. I comforted myself with the thought that though I would be far away, I would not be far away from my music. Little did I know at the time that something else would replace that music and change my life.

As my father readied our car for the trip to Pine Forge, he gave me *Mind, Character, and Personality*, a two-volume set of books by Ellen G. White. I had arrived at the intersection of desiring a personal change in my life, and the resources to begin that change were in my hands. As I read those books, my life started to change. Nothing did more to transform my spiritual experience at the time than the Bible—which *Mind, Character, and Personality* encouraged me to put first in my life. As a young man coming of age and baptized in city culture, God began to remove the distractions that then held me fast, and He’s doing it again in my life now.

Today a different distraction is on the horizon! Many of us hold it in the palms of our hands. Numerous studies today report that digital addiction to electronic devices is causing an alarming rise in depression and anxiety, negative body image and self-esteem, and rising feelings of loneliness and even suicide. Most people spend an average of three to four hours on social media each day. Hours spent in front of screens

has been shown to decrease memory function, empathy, communication skills, ability to focus/attention, and ability to think and reason. These drawbacks affect one's ability to worship God fully and serve Him unreservedly.

I am not immune to the effects of digital media. Sure, I love all the conveniences it gives, the apps that make life easier, but that's not the whole story. My unhealthy digital diet would often find me "doomscrolling" for the next dopamine hit like a drug addict looking for his next fix. There was a time when I reached for my phone when I woke up and it was the last thing I looked at before bed. It had become a god to me with power to positively or negatively affect my mood with every post, like, or tweet. Sound familiar?

I learned back in high school that if I did not make a concerted effort to reclaim my mind and heart for God, I would be lost. As an adult living in a tech-obsessed, digitally addicted world, I sense the need once again to raise a standard against Satan (Isaiah 59:19) in this area of life, that I might fulfill God's purpose for me. It is hard to rebuild our worship altar while addicted to our devices. It's time to "tame" our devices and make them obedient to the will of God!

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Limiting Digital Distractions

Welcome to another session of **Back to the Altar | 100 Days of Prayer!**

The last couple sessions we have been focusing specifically on the Word: How to discover Jesus in the Word and in prayer and how to hide God's Word in our heart. We've shared many biblical and practical tools for growth in these areas.

Today we are going to learn about putting the Word before the World, and what it means to allow Jesus to be Lord, even over our digital distractions. However, before we start this lesson, let's return to the story of Elijah.

The Elijah Revival Moment

In previous Back to the Altar sessions we learned that

Supplemental
Material to Take
This Series Deeper

VIDEOS

**Rebuilding the
Altar of Worship**

[https://tinyurl.com/
BTTAW8VID1](https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW8VID1)

**When We Put
Jesus First**

[https://tinyurl.com/
JesusBeforeDistractions](https://tinyurl.com/JesusBeforeDistractions)

**Digital Life
Bookmark**

[https://tinyurl.com/
BTTA-Balance](https://tinyurl.com/BTTA-Balance)

Elijah stood in God's presence, which enabled him to stand boldly and unflinchingly before king Ahab, even though he was delivering a message that king Ahab did not want to hear. This could have cost Elijah his life, but God was standing with him.

Next, we learned that every time the Word of the Lord came to Elijah, Elijah did not pause to argue with God about the sensibility of His commands. Instead, Elijah immediately obeyed whatever God was asking him to do.

To prepare our hearts for today's Elijah Revival Moment, we have another stand-up activity. Go ahead, stand up, right now, right where you are. As you are standing, begin to march in place. If this seems a little silly, pretend you are in Pathfinders or in a marching band. In your imagination can you hear your leader barking out orders? *Left right, left right, left right!*

As you march, get in the rhythm and say out loud. *Left right, left right, left right, left right.*

Now pause a moment and hold up your left foot, while balancing on your right foot. (Hold on to something if needed to keep your balance.) As you hold that left foot up in the air, pretend your left foot represents your worship of Baal, or spiritual compromises that you may be struggling with in your life today.

Now switch feet and balance on your left foot while you hold your right foot up in the air. In this illustration your right foot represents your allegiance and worship of God.

Now march in place again, starting with the left foot. Only this time, this is the marching chant that you are to say out loud as you march: *Baal God, Baal God, Baal God, Baal God.*

That doesn't sound good, does it? However, this is not just what the children of Israel were doing in Elijah's day. This is what many of God's people are doing still, even today.

Pause right now for a moment of silent prayer and ask God if there's anything in this illustration that He wants to speak to your heart about.

As we watch today's "Elijah Revival Moment," let's ask ourselves, "How is God calling me to rebuild (or make stronger) my personal altar of worship? How is He calling me to put away worldly distractions?"

- **Play Video 1:** Elijah Revival Moment: Rebuilding the Altar of Worship
<https://tinyurl.com/BTTAW8VID1>

Would you like God to be Lord in your life today? Would you like His help dealing with the spiritual distractions that are weighing you down, so your altar of worship can be strong for His glory once again?

The Danger With Digital Distractions!

It does not take a rocket scientist to recognize that digital technologies are occupying a larger slice of our lives than ever before. When we want to remember something, we do not reach for paper and a pen. We reach for our phones. When we want to awake at a certain time, we set the alarm on our smartphone. When we want to pay for something, in

many places of the world, we do it digitally. Digital technology and digital media have become a part of our lives, as integral as our hands and feet.

One survey asked several respondents whether they would rather break a bone or break their phone. Only a slim majority said they would rather break their phone than one of their bones. Technology is changing us, whether we accept it or not.

The biggest toll that digital tech and media is having on us is our inability to focus on things that really matter. Attention is the greatest casualty of our tech-addicted age. Yet, it is the most prized commodity by big digital firms such as Apple, Google, Facebook, Amazon, and more. Attention, ironically, is also the means by which God speaks to us and vice versa. This is the critical reason why we must limit digital distractions and develop healthy digital practices.

Let's get started now!

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

The verse above is attributed to King Solomon, author of most of the book of Proverbs.

Read/Reflect on 1 Kings 11:1-9 - What distractions did Solomon face during his life? How was he affected by some of his distractions?

Among the most dangerous distractions Solomon faced was his unholy desire for many different women. When he failed to surrender this sin to God, his heart was led astray from God. Not even Solomon's great wisdom was a match for the distractions he loved. When Solomon speaks of keeping our hearts with all diligence, he is not referring to the physical heart beating in our chest. Solomon is referring to the affective center of our being—our minds. He is saying in effect, "Guard carefully what you allow to enter your mind, because everything you do in life springs from this source."

The danger of digital media is its ability to place messages deep within our minds, messages that often have nothing to do with God, His Word, nor His purposes for our lives.

How important is it to guard our minds? Ellen White writes, "The mind controls the whole man. All our actions, good or bad, have their source in the mind. It is the mind that worships God and allies us to heavenly beings. Yet many spend all their lives without becoming intelligent in regard to the casket [jewel case] that contains this treasure" (*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol 1, p. 72).

Limiting Digital Distractions – Bible Study

1. Recognize the Distractions

Read/Reflect on Luke 10:38–42

- What was Martha doing that prevented her from enjoying the presence of Jesus?
- Was Martha's desire to care for the physical needs of Jesus wrong?
- What did Jesus mean when He said that Mary had chosen what was better?
- What was Mary doing while Martha was working? What specifically did Jesus commend Mary for doing?

Martha was busy *doing* for Jesus, while Mary was busy *being* with Jesus. Jesus affirmed Mary's choice to sit at His feet because this is the most important thing that any person can do in life. Nothing should ever distract us from spending time in the presence of God. This does not mean that we do not do all the daily things we must do, but we must do them all with a sense that Jesus is with us, and the avenues of our hearts are open to His whisper at every moment.

Take a moment to pause! Recognize the moments when you are going to social media because you are bored, tired, lonely, or stressed. Recognize the distraction for what it is, a feeble attempt to remedy a deeper emptiness in your heart.

2. Discern Digital Distractions

Technology and media are tools—they can help or hinder our walk with God depending on how we use them.

Read/Reflect on 1 Corinthians 6:12 & 10:23

- How can media become a spiritual distraction?
- What are some subtle signs we're spiritually distracted?
- Can good things at times be the enemy of the best thing?

Media becomes a distraction when it consumes our attention, alters our thinking, fuels comparison, or diminishes our time with God. Have you ever noticed how difficult it is sometimes to quiet your mind when trying to focus or meditate on God or Scripture? Restlessness during prayer, constant checking your phone, anxiety, lack of Bible reading, and decreased spiritual hunger are all signals that we are being changed and that our capacity to receive and enjoy God is being diminished. These are blinking red lights in one's spiritual life.

3. Biblical Principles to Refocus and Practical Application

- **Prioritize Quiet Time**

Read/Reflect on Psalm 46:10. Stillness allows us to hear God. There is no substitute for quiet, unrushed time with God. Set a non-negotiable, quiet time at the start of your day to commune with God. Ask Him to wake you up and get up when He calls.

- **Do a "Distraction Audit"**

Read/Reflect on 1 Corinthians 10:12-13. Make a list of the things that are pulling your focus away from God. Maybe it is apps, shows, notifications, people, etc. You cannot limit digital distractions until you are honest about what they are, and how specifically they are stealing precious time from you and God.

- **Pray about each distraction by asking the following:** Is this helping or hindering my relationship with Jesus?

4. Set Digital Boundaries

Read/Reflect on Psalm 16:8. How did King David "filter" the things that he would allow to get his attention?

- Turn off notifications during devotions
- Use “Do Not Disturb” or Focus Modes throughout your day
- Designate screen-free hours or zones. These are times when you turn off your device. This will not be easy, but it will be rewarding if you do it consistently.

5. Replace, Don’t Just Remove

Read/Reflect on Romans 12:21. Replace media time with worship music, Scripture meditation, journaling, or prayer walks. Get creative and be intentional about replacing negative practices with positive spiritual habits or activities.

6. Practice Sabbath Rest

Read/Reflect on Exodus 20:4-8. Use the Sabbath as a day to unplug from media and plug into God, family, rest, and nature. The Sabbath is a perfect time to renew your media-free focus on God and power-up for the week ahead.

7. Personal Practical Application

Not sure where to go from here? Here is a 5-day challenge to get your started on the road to healthier digital habits and more time for God!

5-Day Distraction Detox Challenge

- **Day 1:** Turn off all non-essential notifications.
- **Day 2:** Fast from one of your favorite or commonly used apps for the whole day.
- **Day 3:** Spend 30 minutes in silent reflection in the Word and in prayer instead of wrapped up in screen time.
- **Day 4:** Journal about what God is teaching you.
- **Day 5:** Share your experience with someone else.

What would happen if we put the Word before the world? What if we were to set aside our distractions and put our relationship with Jesus first? To set aside the things that are artificial, and receive something wonderful from Christ Himself?

Join several different families and individuals in the following inspiring 3-minute video as their story unfolds. This video is sure to challenge and convict you in new ways as you seek to live undistracted for God’s glory.

- **Play Video 2:** When We Put Jesus First - <https://tinyurl.com/JesusBeforeDistractions>

Don’t forget, you are invited to join the General Conference weekly Back to the Altar revival on zoom that takes place every Sunday at 6 A.M. Eastern Standard Time. All are welcome! Zoom link - <https://tinyurl.com/BTTA100> Password:18442025

Let’s pray!

Additional Bonus Material

To download a bookmark with reminders of ways to help keep your digital life in balance, click here: <https://tinyurl.com/BTTA-Balance>

Prayer Focus

For May 23-29, 2025



Promises to Claim as You Pray

*"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You,
Because he trusts in You." Isaiah 26:3*

*"I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways.
I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word." Psalm 119:15-16*

*"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners;
and purify your hearts, you double-minded." James 4:8*

Prayer Focus for Week 8

1. **Praise** be to You, Lord, for You are the stillness in my storm and the peace in my noise. I lift up Your name above the chaos of my world. I choose to praise You instead of giving in to distraction. You are worthy of my full attention. (Claim Psalm 113:3)
2. **Honor** belongs to You alone, Lord. I lay aside the distractions that compete for my devotion. May my thoughts, time, and attention reflect the reverence I have for You. You are first in my life. (Claim Matthew 22:37 and Psalm 29:2)
3. **Change** my desires, Lord, so they align with Your will. Remove my attachment to things that pull me away from You. Create in me a new heart—one that craves Your presence more than my phone, media, or mindless distractions. (Claim Romans 12:2 and Psalm 51:10)
4. **Stop** me, Lord, when I begin to drift from You. Interrupt my scrolling, silence the noise, and pull me back into Your stillness. When I'm tempted to numb or escape, remind me that You are my refuge. (Claim Psalm 119:37; Hebrews 12:1)
5. **Revise** my daily rhythm, Lord. Teach me to structure my life around Your voice, not notifications. Help me make wise changes to how I spend my time so I can hear You clearly and walk with You fully. (Claim Ephesians 5:15-16; Proverbs 3:6)
6. **Help** me, God, to focus when my mind wanders and my heart grows restless. Strengthen my discipline to seek You first. I cannot do this without Your Spirit guiding me and steadying my steps. (Claim Psalm 12:1-2; James 4:8)
7. **Breathe** on me Your Holy Spirit, Lord. Prepare me and prepare my brothers and sisters for Your soon coming. Bring us to life through the power of Your Word and prepare us as a church to meet You in the clouds of glory. (Claim Ezekiel 37:4-5)

(We thank Dwain Esmond for this timely study and these heart touching prayers!)