

Under Slavery Again

May 2024

Something very different is going on in our world today. There is a new slavery in our homes and on our streets. For a while, our hand-held devices were an amazing novelty and fun to use. For a while, we thought they would increase our connections to other people and opportunities. But something has changed dramatically in the last few years, and it is not pretty. It is very serious, and people are beginning to even die because of it. You can see it everywhere you go. People have become addicted to their smartphones. There is desperation in their eyes as they walk their dogs, run to the train station, push their children in strollers, work out at the gyms, checking their phones every two or three minutes with their heads buried in the screens. They can barely notice anything else around them. In fact, the rest of the world is a distraction to them. They seem frightened if they have missed someone sending them a message. They have become slaves to their phones and their messages.

Nobody seems to need anyone else anymore. When it gets right down to it, all we need now is our phones. We have come to believe we can navigate most of our lives with it. We can find the answer to almost anything with the right search engine - by ourselves. We have evolved into independent people who have successfully triumphed over needing anyone else to guide or even help us through most of life's challenges or questions. How can this be true? There must be more to it.

Slavery – a condition of being owned or controlled by someone or something else - is a wicked thing, and it can be dangerously subtle as well. The enslaved are often the last ones to know they are captive to something or someone. They have become beholden to a force far greater than themselves; and they find themselves without self-control. For instance, they can't stop looking at their phones. It becomes an engrained constant habit. Slowly,



over time, people become less important than their phones. All sorts of sad things begin to happen. Children can't get the attention of their parents. Teachers struggle to help their students remain focused. And worst of all, when someone is dangerously and constantly distracted, loved ones, colleagues, and friends are ignored and suffer greatly.

Addiction is a form of slavery, and it too, is a wicked thing. Loved ones suffer along with the addict if they do not know how to care for themselves. For instance, in today's world very potent marijuana flows freely through the streets of America. Few people know that six to eight percent of users are experiencing psychotic events. Many end up in hospitals, some with permanent mental health injuries for life. But who wants to dwell on that reality when everyone else seems

to be having so much fun? The last thing a person with a more fragile mental health condition or disposition needs is exposure to a ton of highly charged THC. Pot doesn't make you more relaxed and focused in the long run. Eventually, it has the powerful ability to enslave you and give you a false sense of peace in a highly distracted, fast-paced world. Whether it is a phone or a chemical, our world is filled with temptations which can easily become our masters and easily hurt us and everyone else closely involved with our lives.

The ironies though are tragic. People often dig deeper into their phones to alleviate overwhelming feelings of loneliness, of which there is a lot, only to discover the exact opposite becomes true. The messages they seek, no matter how endearing, do not fulfill the deeper need for personal connection and intimacy which our hearts desire. Why is this the case? Because the message is delivered to us on a screen, not by a live, loving friend standing in front of us. There is a big difference between the two. Text messages are contrived conversations controlled by the sender. They do not have the elements of surprise, spontaneity, unpredictability, and humility inherent in a free-flowing, live dialogue that can teach us how to be on our toes with more agility in our lives. Live dialogue leads to greater emotional intelligence, more friends, a larger community, and the potential for healthy socialization. Our world desperately needs to engage in more live calling and visiting than technical texting and posting. We will certainly be less distracted and more lovingly present for each other if we do so.

What we really need more than anything is constant and live dialogue with God. If we ignore God, we are left to ourselves and our own, lonely echo chambers. And we become sitting ducks for becoming addicted to most anything that comes our way. Without a relationship with God, we are left with a dark hole in our hearts which nothing in this world can fill. Only God can provide a peace in our hearts beyond our own understanding. With God we are never alone or lonely, and this is a major message our world needs right now. We may be hard pressed and challenged by life's difficult circumstances, but we are never alone with God. He gives us a peace, presence, and assurance that warms our hearts like a hot fire on a cold night, or a safe harbor on a stormy sea. We can try to absorb all the text messages and social media posts we can into our minds, but we will always come up empty without God being in our hearts.



One of the saddest addictions going on in our world today is happening in Iran with the iron-fisted rule of the Ayatollah Khamenei and his treacherous Revolutionary Guard. This "Supreme Leader" and his followers are addicted to violence, power, and suppression. They are spending a vast majority of their country's resources on bolstering the regimes of President Assad in

Syria, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Houthis in Yemen, and the Russians in Ukraine. The primary goal of these so-called “friends of Iran” is to kill and destroy everyone who disagrees with them politically and theologically. The Ayatollah and his regime are blood-thirsty people addicted to power at the price of caring for the needs of their own countrymen. Nearly 85 percent of Iranians are praying and hoping for a regime change. Daily, they are suffering tremendously. There is now a frightening shortage of water and food in the country. There is massive unemployment and discontent among the common people, especially women. The religious rulers of Iran are obsessed by their hunger for power and their mission to destroy their adversaries such as Israel, Europe, and the United States. As with any addiction, it is the other family members who often suffer the most, and in this case those people are mostly the majority of Iranians. Please continue to pray for Iran, especially those who are now attending the growing and exploding underground church which my mission organization, Frontier Fellowship, is supporting.



Women protesting in Iran

What our souls need more than anything is a constant truthful flow of messages from God. That is what the Bible is all about. Instead of running to our phones for the latest message from a friend, colleague, family member or someone we don't even know, we should be running to our Bibles in the quiet of the day or night to draw closer to the one who has the most important message of all – his love for us.

The Bible tells us God's son, Jesus, is our great liberator, the only one who can truly set us free from addiction, enslavement, or false idols. Wrestling us away from the power of sin is not an easy task, but God has accomplished it through the life and death of his son, Jesus Christ. The following words of the Apostle Paul capture it best; “Do not let sin control the way you live, do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.” (Romans 6:12-14)

The only thing we should be a slave to is God's grace and love. It will always give us more than we could ever imagine. Let's try to put down our phones a little bit more before we become enslaved to them and they become an addicting and dangerous way of life.