

Avoiding Distractions: Doing God's Work in 2023

By Bob Young

A too-long introduction, a short lesson from Scripture, applications.

Introduction. We live in a world of distractions. A great tool of Satan is distraction! Distraction keeps us focused on secondary things; one step removed from kingdom priorities.

In today's world, social media preoccupies much of our time, posting, reading, opinion-generating activities that contribute little to accomplishing God's eternal purpose. We produce content with minimum investment of time and thought. The result is multiplied postings that seek to drive traffic to our digital platforms. Along the way, the shallow babblings of false experts consume our social media days. We listen to people we would never have chosen to learn from before our world became artificially impersonal.

Christians are not immune. Many church leaders and teachers are devoted to media saturation and intellectual seed-picking (the word Athenian philosophers used to describe Paul in Acts 17:18 – your translation may say babbling). Online, everyone is an expert, despite having no personal history of learning or success that should earn our attention. We feed on half-baked work that required no mental discipline. The difficult work goes undone – mental and spiritual discipline, spiritual discernment, prayerful connection with God's eternal purpose, active engagement in God's mission. Few spend time in deep thought – life is a frantic blur of emails and social media. Posting is the name of the game, and the impersonality of social media limits opportunities to challenge incorrect information. If someone is so bold as to question, it is easy to unfriend or block that person.

Scripture, 1 Timothy 4:12-16. Timothy's responsibility in ministry did not place him above other Christians. His responsibility was to bring salvation for him and his hearers. The verbs Paul uses provide understanding of the seriousness with which every Christian should approach Christian life and service.

THE MODEL

12 – Be an example in every aspect of life so that there is no room for criticism of your immaturity.

13 -- Give attention (*prosecho*, be diligent, devote yourself) to reading of Scripture, teaching, preaching.

THE METHOD. How? First, watch your life. Second, watch your teachings. Then God will work through you for your salvation and the salvation of those you teach.

14 – Do not be neglectful (*ameleo*) of your gift. Be aware of your circumstances, the doors God opens, the situation, the responsibility.

5-16 – Take care of (*meletao*, revolve in the mind, meditate, practice), be (eimi, exist, be absorbed, be immersed), keep a close watch (*epecho*, keep a firm grip on yourself, persistently). Be diligent in these things, be totally committed to them, be absorbed by them, be a clear example to all. Do all of this constantly so that others can see how God develops personal godliness within you. Pay attention to yourself and to your teaching. Stay constantly on guard in these two matters. The goal is changed lives. First, pay careful attention to your life. Then pay careful attention to your teaching.

Applications.

For those who teach and preach, it's time to take time to do the hard, time-consuming work of intense study, reflection, meditation, total absorption. Develop a heart of worship, wonder, wisdom, seeking his word, his will, his work done in his way. Regain your spiritual concentration, manage your time, lay aside the trivial and the incidental in favor of things of eternal urgency and importance. Undistracted thinking is mentally demanding. Take time for thorough study. Become a craftsman in the word and in God's mission. 1 Timothy 4 gives helpful guidance. Your impact eternally will not be measured by how connected you were, the number of posts, the number of likes, the number of sites. God's power moves one in an opposite direction. Lifestyle, convicted living, example, spiritual maturity and vitality, prayerful participation in God's eternal purpose, depth, insight, mental discipline, God's mission, disciples made, churches matured, churches planted.

For all, perhaps it's time to slow down the accessing, scrolling, "liking-loving-caring-laughing-wowing-crying." Resolve in 2023 to a life untethered from the addictive distractions of social media. The guidance of 1 Timothy 4 is for all who want to make progress toward spiritual health in Christ. Pay less attention to social media, learn the practice of focused meditation, realize that great insights often come in moments of tranquility—even boredom. Deeply devoted, dedicated, distinct disciples in a distracted world!

Life-Changing! New habits and new commitments for 2023.