



EXCERPT



Analog Christian

Cultivating Contentment, Resilience, and Wisdom in the Digital Age

July 26, 2022 | \$17, 192 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0316-9

Today's technologies commodify our attention, keeping us scrolling and swiping at all costs. What's the damage to our souls? Exploring the ways the digital age and its values are affecting Christian discipleship, Jay Kim explores how we can cultivate the contentment, resilience, and wisdom to not only survive but to thrive as we navigate the digital age.

The Problem Isn't the Technology

The apps we use are actually using us. We are not so much the customers as the products. Each search and click provides valuable data to companies constantly searching for ways to effectively commodify our attention and, more slyly, our addiction. The bottom line is to keep us scrolling and swiping at any cost. And one of the most effective ways of lulling us in is to situate us in a never-ending loop of comparison, which eventually breeds contempt, before finally devolving into unprecedented levels of self-centric despair. This often leads to a nagging and incessant impatience, as we desperately seek morsels of satisfaction that always leave us wanting. Fearful of perpetual discontent, we grow increasingly hostile, taking out our fears and frustrations on others. Left unchecked, hostility turns to outrage, and we begin to see and treat people as caricatures and enemies, forgetting that we and they are all collectively made in the image of God. As the vicious cycle continues on and on, we seek relief by recklessly indulging in cheap comforts, always available and accessible at the click of a button.

At this point, you may be wondering if I'm Amish and advocating for the elimination of all digital technologies from our lives. No. I grew up in Silicon Valley. I still live here, raising my family and serving a church community here. Most of my friends work in or have some close connection to the tech industry, and many are creating much good in the world. I'm grateful for many digital tools and recognize their value.

The problem isn't the technology. The problem is us.

Digital tools, from email to social media, have become so integral to our everyday lives that we often fail to consider not only what these tools are doing for us but, more importantly, how these tools are forming us. As I pondered my decreasing levels of contentment, resilience, and wisdom alongside the pervasiveness of digital influence on my everyday life, I came to a few conclusions:

- Much of my loss of **contentment** was connected to the persistent sense of **self-centric despair** I felt as I continued spiraling down the vortex of **comparison** loops and **contempt** systems found within social media.
- Much of my loss of **resilience** was connected to the tethering of **hostility** and **impatience**, as antagonism was accelerated, and the easy way out was always just the push of a button or two away.
- Much of my loss of **wisdom** was connected to **forgetfulness**, as the pressures of virtue-signaling and cancel-culture wrapped me up in **outrage**, forgetting what really matters and what doesn't, leaving me exhausted and **recklessly indulging** online for temporary reprieve.

However much or little you relate to my experience, a life of increasing contentment, resilience, and wisdom is something we're all after. And in one way or another, most of us know that the digital age has dangerously undone some of the necessary work of such a life. But there is an ancient and timeless remedy for this undoing, a way to come up for analog air above the digital smoke. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). He goes on to describe the result of this walking by the Spirit as the cultivation of what he identifies as the fruit of the Spirit:



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“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23 ESV).

These are not a set of disconnected, optional, pick-and-choose attributes at a Christian buffet. This isn’t an invitation to fill your life with a bit of this and that as you go along. These are the definitive characteristics of the singular fruit of the Spirit, the undeniable result of a life inhabited by God, as we patiently and steadily walk the way of Jesus. These are also not simply inner qualities meant to offer us individual comfort. They are, according to theologian John Barclay, “the social characteristics that enhance and maintain a community” and “new patterns of social relationship.”⁶ The Spirit bears fruit in us so that he might bring flourishing to the world through us, one relationship and one community at a time.

This passage is near the end of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, and it’s important to remember that one of his foremost concerns throughout the letter is to remind the early Christians in Galatia of their identity, and what specifically does and does not constitute that identity. In other words, the Spirit’s fruit is not about doing particular things in order to be a particular people. Conversely, it’s about being a particular people, which inevitably leads to a particular sort of living and doing in the world. More specifically, it’s about the fact that our identification as the people of God is marked by the living Spirit of God working in and through us, expressed in our relationships with one another.

Fruit is a sign of life. Living trees bear fruit. Dead ones don’t. In the same way, those who are inhabited by the Spirit of the living God will bear fruit. As Christopher Wright puts it, “These are the qualities that God himself will produce in a person’s every day, ordinary human life because the life of God himself is at work within them.” And, wonderfully and beautifully, the fruit of the Spirit offers us the very specific antidotes we most desperately need for the undoing we’re experiencing in the digital age.

- Love**, instead of self-centric despair
- Joy**, instead of comparison
- Peace**, instead of contempt
- Leading to a life of **contentment**.
- Patience**, instead of impatience
- Kindness** and **Goodness**, instead of hostility
- Leading to a life of **resilience**.
- Faithfulness**, instead of forgetfulness
- Gentleness**, instead of outrage
- Self-control**, instead of reckless indulgence
- Leading to a life of **wisdom**.

—Taken from the introduction, “Digital Smoke, Analog Air, and Fruit”



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Q & A



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“Analog Christian gives voice to a part of all of us that longs for a day when Christians are known for their fruit over their fame. This work will set Jay Kim up as an enduring voice for the church for this generation. Highly recommended.”

—A. J. Swoboda, assistant professor of Bible and theology at Bushnell University, author of *After Doubt*

New from the Author of *Analog Church*

Your first book was *Analog Church*, which was about the ramifications of a digital church, from our worship and experience of Christian community to the way we engage Scripture and sacrament. What prompted the idea for this new book, *Analog Christian*?

Jay Y. Kim: The digital age is in the business of commodifying our attention and its technologies are determined to keep us scrolling and swiping at all costs. Blind to the dangers, we enjoy its temporary pleasures, unaware of the significant damage being done to our souls. I wrote *Analog Christian* as both a wake-up call and a declaration of hope—that we find ourselves in dangerous territory but that there is immense and accessible hope.

What in particular are you exploring with regard to the effect of the digital age on our spiritual lives?

Jay: *Analog Christian* is an exploration of the intersection between the digital age and Christian discipleship. Specifically, the book juxtaposes specific ways our digital addictions and vices (self-centric despair, comparison, contempt, impatience, hostility, forgetfulness, outrage, reckless indulgence) are forming us with the specific, and antidotal, attributes of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, Galatians 5:22-23).

What key points do you hope readers take away from *Analog Christian*?

Jay:

- The digital technologies we think we’re using are in fact using us. More than simply informing us, they are, in actuality, forming us.
- Lack of awareness or apathy toward the formational effects of our usage of digital technologies is an utterly dangerous and untenable path.
- There is immense and accessible hope for the predicament we’re in—inviting the Spirit of God to bear fruit in us, day by day, decision by decision.
- Bearing fruit is a slow and steady process; it requires patience and persistence.
- Doing the slow and steady work leads to a life of contentment, resilience, and wisdom, both on the far side of the work and in the very midst of it.



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