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Abstract

"Social media platforms are built to encourage addictive use, stimulating the same neurological connections as slot machines and drug addicts to encourage us to return to the well for further despair."

Posting about the book *Analog Christian* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/digital-fruits-of-the-spirit-a-review-of-analog-christian/>

Keywords

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Comments

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‘Digital’ Fruits of the Spirit?: A Review of *Analog Christian*

Mike Janssen

December 20, 2022

Title: *Analog Christian: Cultivating Contentment, Resilience, and Wisdom in the Digital Age*

Author: Jay Y. Kim

Publisher: IVP

Publishing Date: July 26, 2022

Pages: 192 (Paperback)

ISBN: 978-1514003169

Outrage.

Impatience.

Hostility.

Despair.

These are some of the fruits of online life identified by Pastor Jay Y. Kim in his new book, *Analog Christian*.

Throughout this short new book, Kim contrasts this typical experience of online life with the calling of the Christian to contentment, resilience, and wisdom, which make up the book’s three parts.

In the first chapter, for instance, Kim compares the Christian vision of love with *self-centric despair*. For Kim, self-centrism is “an unremitting gaze inward” and need not be the same as narcissism or self-centeredness. We are self-centric when we disengage from uncomfortable or awkward situations in our embodied, physical existence and focus on our curated, “algorithmically precise” digital experiences. As he rightly notes, these digital interactions—photos of a beautiful vacation a friend from high school shared, funny stories about our friends’ seemingly-perfect children, and so on—can lead to a feeling of inferiority, and even despair. Moreover, social media platforms are built to encourage addictive use, stimulating the same neurological connections as slot machines and drug addicts to encourage us to return to the well for further despair. But why do we do this?

As a pastor, Kim identifies our innate, creaturely, human desire for love as a reason we turn to social media for validation. He pushes against the posture of self-centrism encouraged by social media platforms toward a vision of love as vocation and resurrection—not just that we are loved by God and others, but that we are *called to love*, and this cannot happen in a self-centric position.

Throughout the rest of the book, Kim draws other contrasts: between joy and comparison, peace and contempt, and gentleness and outrage, among others. His incisive critiques of our online habits and the way they draw fundamentally un-Christlike behaviors out of us are on point, as are his calls for Christians to a better, richer life of the Spirit. I found myself nodding along with nearly everything he had to say.

My main critiques of Kim's argument is less about what it does say than what it doesn't say.

First, after assuring the reader he isn't advocating for eliminating digital technologies, he writes:

- 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.¹

On the one hand, he's right. I have certainly been guilty of unthinkingly adopting new digital tools based on a promise of productivity, connection, etc., without giving thought to how they might negatively shape my life. In that sense, I am a part of the problem.

However, it seems that he lets the creators of these digital tools and services off the hook too easily. They are not neutral. While he acknowledges the ways in which social media companies have worked to make their platforms more addictive, he fails to take the obvious next step and suggest that *maybe we shouldn't use them at all*.

This leads to my second critique. Each chapter clearly describes a problem of online life before calling Christians to repentance. To borrow a phrase: how should we then live? The book includes no clear, practical suggestions for how to evaluate and reorient one's relationship with digital technology (such as Cal Newport's *digital declutter*). No clear guidelines for responsible use are given, nor does this oversight seem to be acknowledged. Given the extent to which digital tools have permeated modern society, recalibrating one's digital life can feel overwhelming. The book could have been stronger by offering practical ideas for how to start this process.²

Nonetheless, Jay Kim has given the Church a helpful resource for thinking about our digital life. He clearly identifies several ways in which digital technology is negatively forming us, and helpfully contrasts them with Christ's call to cultivate fruit of the Spirit. He also provides discussion questions to pair with each chapter, which could be used in a small group setting. This book can provide a helpful place to continue cultivating Christian virtues as we carefully discern digital decisions towards...

Wisdom,

Resilience,

and Contentment.

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1. pg. 8
 2. Kim *does* helpfully include discussion questions for each chapter at the end of the book, so perhaps his intent is for Christians to read this in small groups and build a philosophy of digital technology use in that context.