A REDEEMING PRODUCTIVITY GUIDE

# The 5×5 Focus Fix

Five simple habits. Five days. A short sprint to reclaim your attention.

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INTRODUCTION

# Why We Can't Focus

Our attention spans have dropped dramatically over the last twenty years. This is a problem for everyone, but it should be especially important to Christians, who view our lives not as our own but as a stewardship given to us by God.

How can we do our work with excellence, pursue our God-glorifying goals with intensity, and fix our eyes on Christ, when our focus is being pulled in 100 different directions at once?

It all started with work. In the late 20th century, the West shifted from a labor-based economy to a knowledge-based economy. It used to be that your body was the main way you created value. But when we moved to the office and later online, we became what Peter Drucker famously termed "knowledge workers," those who think for a living. Suddenly our minds became the value center.

> *A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.*
>
> HERBERT A. SIMON, 1971

This trend accelerated with the birth of the Internet. In 1997, Michael H. Goldhaber predicted what we all know to be true today: in the online world, the currency is not labor or money, it's attention.

Even if you aren't a knowledge worker, you're still part of the attention economy. The plumber scrolling X is making money for advertisers, as is the child running a Google search, or the retiree flipping channels on the TV. From the interstate billboard in Kansas to the lock screen on your Kindle, there is no escaping it.

# The Cost of Stolen Focus

As advertisers, social media companies, and the entertainment industry have strip-mined our attention through notifications, gamification, and psychological manipulation, our ability to sustain focus has collapsed.

To understand just how costly this has been, we need to recognize that **attention is upstream of almost everything blessed in life.** When you lose the ability to focus:

- You can't pursue sustained goals
- You can't build deep relationships
- You can't do the long, focused work of reading or study
- You can't pray without your mind wandering
- You can't read the Word of God for an extended period of time

That's why we should view the war on our attention as a spiritual war. We want to be serious Christians who are maturing in our faith, honoring Christ with our work, relationships, and discipline. And that requires serious focus.

> *The reason why the majority of Christians never attain to any eminence in the divine life, is because they let the floods of their life run away in a dozen little, trickling rivulets, whereas, if they cooped them up into one channel, and sent that one stream rolling on to the glory of God, there would be such a force and power about their character … that they would really 'live while they lived.'*
>
> CHARLES SPURGEON, "THE TIME IS SHORT"

Your attention is only powerful when it is concentrated. And that's the good news: **if we can fix our focus, we can fix our lives.**

THE PLAN

# Five Habits, Five Days

Fixing your focus is a lifelong battle, but here's a simple plan to get started this very week. For the next five days, practice all five of these habits every single day. Think of it as a short, intense sprint to retrain your brain and reclaim your concentration.

1. *Log your distractions*
2. *Avoid your #1 attention thief*
3. *Read a real book for 30 minutes*
4. *No screens in bed or before breakfast*
5. *One hour of screen-free deep work*

## 1 Log Your Distractions

We begin with awareness. It's one thing to monitor screen time, but we want to actively pay attention to every time we feel distracted. We do this by writing our distractions down.

Each time you are distracted throughout the day, jot down the time, what you were trying to focus on, and what distracted you. **Use the Distraction Log at the back of this guide.**

## 2 Avoid Your #1 Attention Thief

For most of us, the phone is the biggest black hole for our attention. But more specifically, it's probably a certain app. There it is. The one you just thought of. **Delete that app.** You don't have to keep it deleted forever, just for these five days.

## 3 *Read a Real Book for 30 Minutes*

This can be Bible reading. That adds up to 2 hours and 30 minutes over the course of five days. You could read the entirety of Matthew, Luke, or Acts in a week if you did that.

If you've already got your devotions dialed in, make it another book. Remember, the goal is not just to remove screen time but to replace it with something that will train you to focus for longer. The content of your reading is secondary to that objective.

## 4 *No Screens in Bed or Before Breakfast*

Set it as a rule that you won't look at your phone after you're in bed. If you normally watch a show before sleeping, replace it with habit number 3 and just read a bit.

Likewise, resolve not to use your phone or computer before you finish breakfast. Your phone should not be the first thing you reach for in the morning. Email, messages, and social media can wait an hour.

## 5 *One Hour of Screen-Free Deep Work*

Work on something important using only pen and paper, or hands-on tools. No screens, not even earbuds. Just time to let your mind focus on what you're doing without external input.

**Block 60 minutes on your calendar** to work on a goal or project: something around the house, a writing project, or something for work. Even if it's normally a computer task, resolve to work on it on a pad of paper first. You'd be surprised what it does for your thinking and focus.

AFTER DAY FIVE

# Reflect and Keep Going

At the end of the five days, look back over your Habit Checklist and Distraction Log, then work through the reflection questions at the back of this guide. Notice what was hardest, what helped most, and what patterns show up in your distractions.

Then choose at least one habit to keep. The aim of all of this isn't simply to reduce screen time, but to replace it with something better: something that retrains us to focus on what matters most.

> *Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.*
>
> PROVERBS 4:25

I pray this serves you in your pursuit of a more focused, more productive, and more God-honoring life!

KEEP GOING

Get more done for the glory of God.

Essays, podcasts, and resources on a biblical approach to productivity at redeemingproductivity.com

# *Habit Checklist*

START DATE _____

*Fill in a circle each day you complete the habit.*

| DAY | LOG DISTRACTIONS | AVOID YOUR #1 THIEF | READ 30 MIN | NO SCREENS IN BED / BEFORE BREAKFAST | 1 HR DEEP WORK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 2 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 3 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 4 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| 5 | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

MY #1 ATTENTION THIEF

WHAT I'M READING THIS WEEK

MY DEEP WORK PROJECT

# Distraction Log

DAY _____ DATE _____

| TIME | INTENDED FOCUS | DISTRACTION |
|---|---|---|
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# *Reflection*

DATE

1 What was the hardest habit to maintain each day, and why?

2 Which habit had the biggest impact on your ability to focus?

3 Looking at your distraction log, did you notice any patterns in what or when you got distracted?

4 If you could keep just one of these five habits long-term, which would it be and why?

5 How will you continue to protect your attention now that the challenge is over?