

Liberty University School of Divinity

**A Phenomenological Study:  
The Quest for God in an Epoch of Distraction**

A Thesis Project Submitted to  
The Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity  
On Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

by

**Todd Marcy**

Lynchburg, Virginia

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Liberty University School of Divinity

**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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Mentor

Dr. David Hirschman  
Associate Professor of Religion

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Reader

Dr. Dwight Rice  
Assistant Professor of Pastoral  
Counseling

## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Todd Marcy

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2018

Mentor: Dr. David Hirschman

Distraction happens to everyone at some point in time. Diverted attention while driving can have serious consequences, and being sidetracked while talking on the cellphone can cause one to forget where the car keys were laid down at home. Distraction at church during a worship service can affect one's relationship with God and others. Personal motivations, pre-existing conditions, and duration of time contribute to how a person will interact with a disturbance of attention; likewise, factors of biology, technology, values, and mores can influence the power of partial attention. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the lived experiences of pastors and congregants at Faith Community Church in Kissimmee, Florida, and the impact of this study can potentially increase a grasp on distraction and its effect upon a congregation. This study proves a correlation exists between an object, the phenomena of distraction, and a person's spiritual journey.

## Acknowledgements

Zig Ziglar quipped, “Of all the ‘attitudes’ we can acquire, surely the attitude of gratitude is the most important and by far the most life changing.” It is in this spirit that I wish to express my profound respect and admiration for Dr. David Hirschman. As my mentor, he has chipped away my flawed thinking, carved my skill as a pastor-scholar, and hand-crafted hopefully what will display work worthy of his time and effort. Also, I wish to extend my appreciation for Dr. Dwight Rice in his refinement of this treatise because without his careful eye this work would be a tome without rhyme or reason.

Jim Rohn remarked, “One of the greatest gifts you can give is the gift of attention.” So, I wish to extend my love, affection, and attention to Lynette, my wife. My joy is being side-by-side with her serving our Lord Jesus Christ every day, and I am forever grateful that God placed her in my life. I am humbled by the love and devotion given to me by my mom, dad, and brother, and I am grateful to God for having placed them in my life. For Vern, Lynn, Tim, Donna, Tyler, and Trevor, I am blessed and appreciative of your love and companionship.

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# Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
Contents.....	vi
Tables.....	ix
Figures.....	x
Abbreviations.....	xi
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Research Gap.....	3
Research Question.....	4
Terminology and Definition.....	5
Purpose of Study.....	6
Significance of Study.....	7
Statement of Methodology.....	13
Statement of Limitations.....	16
Review of Literature.....	17
Books.....	17
Bible.....	19
Locating Self.....	22
Description of Participants.....	23
Collection of Data.....	23

Analysis of Data.....	24
Authentication of Data.....	24
Chapter Summary.....	24
<b>Chapter 2: Elements and Undercurrents of Distraction.....</b>	<b>26</b>
Introduction.....	26
Philosophical: The Phenomena of Distraction.....	28
Theological: Spirituality and Distraction.....	32
Psychological: Gestalt and Distraction.....	40
Intermediate Summary.....	46
Biological: The Anatomy of Distraction.....	47
Environmental: The Background of Distraction.....	53
Practical: The Action of Distraction.....	59
Chapter Summary.....	63
<b>Chapter 3: Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>67</b>
Results.....	67
Section 1: How a Person Experiences Distraction.....	68
Theme 1: Definition of Distraction.....	68
Theme 2: Kinds and Causes of Distractions.....	69
Theme 3: Feelings about Distractions.....	74
Theme 4: Overcoming Distractions.....	76
Section 2: Perceptions about Relationship with God.....	79
Theme 1: Current Relationship with God.....	79

Theme 2: Role of Distraction with God.....	81
Chapter Summary.....	84
<b>Chapter 4: Conclusion</b> .....	88
The Link Between Distraction and Spirituality.....	88
Contributions to Meaning, Significance, and Importance of Distraction.....	89
Section 1: The Breadth of Impact of Distraction.....	89
Section 2: The Depth of Impact of Distraction.....	89
Section 3: The Scope of Distraction.....	91
Section 4: Continuing the Discussion of Distraction.....	92
Synopsis of Research.....	92
Theory of Distraction.....	94
Implications of Applied Research.....	98
Recommendations for Further Study.....	99
Practical Application for Ministry.....	100
Final Thought.....	101
Appendix A.....	102
Appendix B.....	103
Bibliography.....	104



## Tables

1. Kinds and Causes of Distraction.....	70
2. How Congregants Overcome Distraction.....	77
3. Congregants' Perception of Their Relationship with/to God.....	80

## Figures

1. Feelings about Distractions.....	74
2. How Distractions Affect Relationship to God.....	81

## **Abbreviations**

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CAT	Computerized Axial Tomography
fMRI	Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
MRI	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
ODD	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
PET	Positron Emission Tomography
qEEG	Quantitative Electroencephalograms
SPECT	Single Photon Emission Computed Tomography

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Distraction imposes its will upon attention with such force that nothing dares stand in its way, and ruminations flow freely as to its origin, purpose, and impact. It can mean the difference between a flight to the stars or crashing into a ball of flame. Distraction happens in a millisecond, but its consequence can last a lifetime, if not eternity.

To date, no identifying theory or philosophy concerning distraction exists even though it's cousin, attention, is spoken of quite often. Paul North says, "...distraction is nearest when it escapes notice and most remote when attended to (sic). One finds theories of marginal phenomena such as laughter, boredom, and forgetting, and of course of central concepts such as form, appearance, language, and so forth, but never a full-fledged 'theory of distraction.'"<sup>1</sup> Philosophers point to distraction's power and effect, but no one has framed a theory concerning its existence until now.

Across the philosophical landscape, skyscrapers of being, essence, and consciousness of thought raise themselves up to the sky while distraction serves only the purposes of such imposing structures. The foundations laid from Aristotle to Descartes speak to the need to understand what it means to be human, and the steel girders of attention are welded together to form a support for economies, politics, and societies. Walls of theology and thought rise from the foundations and reach to the heavens, but it is the windows of distraction that allow one to see the world beyond. When opened, it lets the stale air of arrogance and stubbornness to be removed and the fresh air of insight and learning to pour in and refresh. However pleasant a distraction might seem, open windows and broken panes can expose one to forces of nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul North, *The Problem of Distraction* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2012), 13, Kindle.

The problem of distraction is not merely an esoteric or philosophic discussion, and it must not be taken lightly. Queries about distracted drivers speak to real issues of road rage and traffic fatalities.<sup>2</sup> Diverted attention results in casualties in war and fills hospitals with trauma victims. Blaise Pascal says that diversion masks the void within a person, and by removing it, it reveals a life of weariness and unhappiness.<sup>3</sup> Preachers, of old, chide those taken in by distraction offered from the reading of a pocket novel,<sup>4</sup> and educators lament the constant barrage of disruption clamoring for attention in the classroom.<sup>5</sup> While each age may have its unique set of problems relating to distraction, today the issue has grown exponentially.

Technology is expanding at rates of an unprecedented magnitude never before seen in human history, and it has a profound impact on the individual whether they realize it or not. Gary Small maintains, “The current explosion of digital technology not only is changing the way we live and communicate but is rapidly and profoundly altering our brains.”<sup>6</sup> Tony Reinke says, “The more distracted we are digitally, the more displaced we become spiritually.”<sup>7</sup> Distraction threatens both body and soul. This study explores the ramifications of the phenomena of distraction in the church and its potential harm in a person’s quest for God.

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<sup>2</sup> Donmez Birsan, Linda Ng Boyle, and John D. Lee, “Safety Implications of Providing Real-time Feedback to Distracted Drivers,” *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 39, (2007): 581-590. Accessed July 1, 2017. doi:10.1016/j.aap.2006.10.003.

<sup>3</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts, Letters, and Minor Works*, ed. Charles W. Elliot, 54 ed. (New York: P. F. Collier, 1961), 4:63.

<sup>4</sup> John Thorn, “That Dastardly Dime Novel,” *Voices* (Fall, 2008), 34:15. Accessed July 4, 2017. <http://media.proquest.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/media/pq/classic/doc>.

<sup>5</sup> Aakash Taneja, Vincent Fiore, and Briana Fischer, “Cyber-slacking in the Classroom: Potential for Distraction in the New Age,” *Computers and Education* 82, (2015): 141-151. Accessed July 1, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2014.11.009>.

<sup>6</sup> Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan, *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 1, Kindle.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Reinke, *Twelve Ways Your Phone is Changing You* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 779, Kindle.

## Statement of the Problem

People are losing their ability to focus for a sustainable period due to distractions, information overload, and limited brain capacity,<sup>8</sup> and a contributing factor is a smartphone.<sup>9</sup> Independently, philosophy, theology, psychology, biology, and more consider the phenomena of distraction, but each fail to present a cohesive wholeness to the subject. Research in neuroscience explores how this device changes the anatomy and function of the brain, and psychology wrestles with the effect on mental health and social connections. Theology examines the biblical underpinnings, and in the end, pragmatism grapples with the practical implications. Each have their place, but as a collective whole, they may offer a greater understanding of the problem of distraction.

To address the phenomena of distraction, an examination of Scripture and literary resources reveal biblical and current thinking, and testing shows the understanding of the lived experience relating to the phenomena of distraction. Various academic disciplines approach the subject through their sphere of reference, but noticeably absent is the effect distraction is having upon those in church.

## Research Gap

Up to the present time, much of the research examines the philosophical, social, or psychological aspects of distraction. For example, Matthew Crawford says, “Clearly, no single discipline or body of thought is adequate to parse the crisis of attention that characterizes our cultural moment. There is a rich literature on attention in cognitive psychology, extending from

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<sup>8</sup> Torkel Klingberg, *The Overflowing Brain: Information Overload and the Limits of Working Memory*, trans, Neil Betteridge (New York: Oxford Press, 2009), 7, Kindle.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 3-4, Kindle.

William James's work of a century ago to the latest findings in childhood development. There are scattered treatments in moral philosophy, and these are indispensable."<sup>10</sup> No discipline has the complete picture regarding distraction, yet when taken as a whole, the subject becomes very complex and layered. Crawford continues, "The fact has not been widely noticed, but attention is the organizing concern of the tradition of thought called phenomenology, and this tradition offers a bridge between the mutually uncomprehending fields of cognitive psychology and moral philosophy."<sup>11</sup> There is a need for a phenomenological study of distraction within the church.

The quest for God in an epoch of distraction is not merely a philosophical discussion. The result of diversion upon a congregant at church may have profound consequences regarding the person's soul and their destiny for eternity. Yesterday's study of attention is not sufficient to answer questions arising from the onslaught of distraction due to the current technological advances.

### **Research Question**

The researcher is asking the question of "what and how" do individuals of Faith Community Church experience distraction. As individuals, the research study explores the subjective experience of each and analyzes the shared, objective experience of the group concerning the issue.<sup>12</sup> For example, at church during a worship service, a smartphone may ring. Some individuals may turn their attention to the direction of the interruption, and others may not. So, the question becomes of what each member experiences, and how do they feel towards this

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew B. Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in the Age of Distraction* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 7, Kindle.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013), 78-79.

subjective experience. Then, commonalities are ferreted out explaining the phenomena of distraction as a whole. Understanding the experience becomes useful for arriving at an application of the conclusions learned.

### **Terminology and Definitions**

Cellphone (i.e. smartphone):

A device that is part of a cellular system,<sup>13</sup> and it is small, portable, and hand-held. It is useful for telecommunications, internet access, computing platforms, and more.

Distraction (i.e., Distract, Distracted):

To draw or direct (as one's attention) to a different object or in different directions at the same time; mentally confused, troubled, or remote; the state of being distracted.<sup>14</sup>

Phenomenology:

“The study of the development of human consciousness and self-awareness as a preface to or a part of philosophy.”<sup>15</sup> “Literally, phenomenology is the study of ‘phenomena’: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first-person point of view.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Merriam-Webster, “Cell Phone,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11 ed., (Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, 2014), 84894, Kindle.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 127712-127730.

<sup>15</sup> Merriam-Webster, 270935, Kindle.

<sup>16</sup> David Woodruff Smith, “Phenomenology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter Ed, 2016), Edward N. Zalta, ed., Accessed July 8, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/phenomenology>.



### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the link between how a person experiences distraction and its effect upon their perceptions concerning their relationship to God. Douglas Groothuis, Professor of Philosophy at Denver Seminary, states, “Cyberspace may be the greatest temptation yet offered to humanity to lose its soul in diversion.”<sup>17</sup> Though Groothuis penned this twenty-years ago, not only were his observations correct, but with today’s technology (i.e., smartphone), humanity may be propelling itself toward this end at an alarming rate of speed.

Second, this study gives a cursory overview of related disciplines about attention and distraction. Gathering facts from thorough studies in areas of philosophy, psychology, and the like aids its understanding elements relevant to distraction. The commonalities prove to be of value in understanding the correlation of distraction to one’s spiritual journey.

Finally, the purpose of this study examines the nature of distraction. Distraction is more than a single occurrence. Multiple occurrences of distraction, taken as a singular object and existing beyond the individual, may prove useful in understanding how the phenomena are best framed. For example, a bushel of apples is experienced as a single unit even though it has many individual parts.<sup>18</sup> This purposeful study of the phenomena of distraction rests on understanding the significance of perception and the interaction with the outside versus inside world of the individual.

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<sup>17</sup> Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyberspace* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stack, 1997), 82.

<sup>18</sup> Stephan Käufer and Anthony Chemero, *Phenomenology: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 30, Kindle.

### Significance of the Study

There are a number of generalized benefits of this study. For example, the Thesis Project aids by extending the discussion of phenomenology, highlights the subject/object relationship of an individual to a cellphone, provides a framework to understand the issue of distraction, derives existential meaning for the individual, provides applications of a theoretical construct, and an understanding of the potential loss of self-awareness. This projects seeks to bridge the gap between spiritual and the physical world for an individual.

First, to grasp the phenomena of distraction, one must realize that everything rests on the thinking process (i.e., philosophy). For every action, there is an underlying reason. Stephan Käufer maintains,

The simplest reason one should study phenomenology is because everyone should. Even a fairly superficial study of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, or Merleau-Ponty and those influenced by them can have a profound positive impact on our understanding of a host of issues relating to perception, cognition, and the general meaningfulness of human lives. Phenomenological approaches to a broad spectrum of issues are interesting, accurate, and promising.<sup>19</sup>

The study of Phenomenology aids in creating a construct for understanding distraction. For example, if a person sitting in a pew is distracted by their neighbor reaching in a purse for a piece of gum, then phenomenology looks at what and how the person feels about this experience. The subjective experience is explained in relation to the object.

This study highlights the subject-object experience in a very specific manner. The benefit of this study is the specific relationship of one to the other; meaning, it explores what a person feels concerning being distracted by a cellphone. Further, the project studies how the individual feels about what they experienced. Distraction may happen due to a conscious decision to be

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<sup>19</sup> Käufer, *Phenomenology*, 4, Kindle.

distracted or an unplanned event that diverts attention. The subject-object relationship is explored in this study and provides a paradigm for understanding distraction.

Another generalized benefit of this study is putting together a construct for distraction. Crawford makes the case for creating “a movement that really answers to a deeper need: We want to feel that our world is intelligible, so we can be responsible for it.”<sup>20</sup> Putting together a mental framework is beneficial in order to make sense of the phenomena one experiences. Just like in building a home, the interior design and furniture are dependent upon the design, framing, and more. It makes no sense to buy a piece of artwork that hangs on a wall if there is no stud to hang it on. There must be a framework upon which everything hangs like drywall, electrical, plumbing, fixtures, and the like. In similar manner, this study is beneficial for constructing a framework that will support the concept of distraction. In the process, the thesis project will seek to elucidate on matters of existentialism.

In a generalized manner, the more profound issues of meaning and purpose, death and life, and value and significance course throughout the study. Humanity is the highest of God’s created order on earth, and while an individual shares existence with say, a dog, an individual is more than a dog. Kevin Aho, explaining modern existentialism says, “Although it cannot be reduced to a unified school of thought..., the common thread that ties these thinkers together is their concern for the human situation as it is lived. This is a situation that cannot be reasoned about or captured in an abstract system; it can only be felt and made meaningful by the concrete choices and actions of the existing individual.”<sup>21</sup> Phenomenology concerns itself with the study

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 8, Kindle.

<sup>21</sup> Kevin Aho, *Existentialism: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 168, Kindle.

of the lived experience, and existentialism seeks to answer the meaning of life through the lived experience. Aho continues by drawing attention to the impact of distraction,

...we are always diverted and distracted from the present moment by desiring the next thing. But filling ourselves with things cannot fill the void because the human situation is itself a void; it is no-thing. A number of existentialists have pointed out how this manifestation of suffering is exacerbated today because modern technology has created increasingly sophisticated ways to manufacture distractions and rapidly satisfy new cravings. Indeed, Heidegger will refer to this state of restless distraction as one of signature ‘symptoms’ of modernity, where we are “unable-to-bear the stillness” of our own lives and are always caught up in the “mania for what is surprising, for what immediately sweeps [us] away and impresses [us], again and again and in different ways.”<sup>22</sup>

A benefit to this study is the purpose of understanding distraction as it relates to the meaning of existence, it furthers the study of phenomenology and existentialism, highlights the subject-object relationship, creates a framework, and probes applications of the theoretical. Finally, the Thesis Project looks at the potential loss of self-awareness due to distraction.

A smartphone provides the user the means to avoid any introspection. The benefit of this study is the orientation and alignment to Self, and in doing so, the challenge will be to move beyond Self. Gary Thomas states, “Our theology — our belief in what is possible — must not be shaped by our experience but rather by God’s Word.”<sup>23</sup> Self-awareness may be a challenge to arrive at due to distraction, but it is not impossible.

In general, this Thesis Project aids in understanding, challenging, and shaping a biblical world-view, and this study extends the body of literature of Practical Theology, Psychology, and Leadership. As theology is put into practice, this study will extend current understanding of how to live the Christian life. Francis Chan, a pastor, says, “It’s so rare nowadays to be able to look

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<sup>22</sup> Aho, *Existentialism*, 155-156, Kindle.

<sup>23</sup> Gary L. Thomas, *Every Body Matters: Strengthening Your Body to Strengthen Your Soul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 1751-1752, Kindle.

someone in the eye without interruption or distraction. . . . In my quest to accomplish much, I've lost the art of focusing on one thing or one person. This, in turn, has affected my prayer life. . . . I find it harder to simply be with God, to focus only on Him while spending intentional time with Him."<sup>24</sup> This study seeks to address such matters that Chan has raised and more. Many pastors and congregants may bemoan the sentiment of being distracted but may not understand to what degree distraction impairs them or what to do about it. This study will enable the reader to gain wisdom (e.g., Proverbs 3:13), teach the care and nurturing of God's flock (e.g., Luke 22:32) and train people to give thought to their actions (e.g., Psalm 119:59).

In general, the field of psychology furthers due to the study of distraction. Several disciplines (i.e., Gestalt Therapy, Existential Psychology, and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy) have interest in the subject of attention. To understand the what and how of the here-and-now of the behavior of being distracted is of interest to a counselor. In general, counseling explores issues of meaning and purpose, holes in thinking or personality, and to find answers of why a certain thought process or behavior exists. Pastoral counseling looks at the positive and negative influences of distraction on the soul. Not only will this study examine issues pertinent to Practical Theology and Psychology, but the research of distraction benefits studies in leadership.

Furthering the area of studies in leadership will be a component of this Thesis Project. A leader examines Self in relation to distraction (i.e., Phenomenology). James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, in their seminal work, declare, "... it's necessary to have clear goals, because they help you concentrate and avoid distractions. By having an intention to do something that is

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<sup>24</sup> Francis Chan, *Forgotten God: Reversing our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2009), 987, Kindle.

meaningful to you, by setting a goal, you take purposeful action.”<sup>25</sup> A leader must avoid distraction by developing personally and aiding those around him or her to do the same. John C. Maxwell states, “Success is knowing your purpose in life, growing to reach your maximum potential, and sowing seeds that benefit others.”<sup>26</sup> A good leader seeks to understand Self, personal and team development, distraction and setbacks, the value of concentrated focus, and living up to commitments. This study will be beneficial to others by extending the discussion of leadership.

In general, the significance of this study forwards phenomenology, a construct to understand distraction, and derives answers of existential meaning and purpose. This Thesis Project furthers the work of various fields like Practical Theology, Psychology, and Leadership. Various groups of individuals will benefit from this project. The significance of study will support the work of Pastors, Counselors, and Leaders. The research will directly further the work of pastors as it will undertake the study of distraction by studying the lives of pastors and congregants alike. Pastors, as well as philosophers, turn their attention to matters of the nature of reality, truth, morality, ethics, and the meaning of life. This study addresses these types of issues to gain understanding and wisdom. John Piper discusses the importance of attention and its link to holiness by saying, “Our salvation and the salvation of those who hear us week after week depend in large measure on our faithful attention to personal holiness and sound teaching. More is at stake in our work than greater or lesser progress in sanctification. The salvation of our

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<sup>25</sup> James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 281, Kindle.

<sup>26</sup> John C. Maxwell, *Three Things Successful People Do: The Road Map That Will Change Your Life* (Nashville: Nelson, 2016), 11, Kindle.

believing hearers is on the line.”<sup>27</sup> The urgency to address this issue of distraction cannot be more necessary. A Christian counselor will find that the client will present much of the same behaviors in a therapeutic setting., and a counselor, too, will ultimately be concerned about the client’s eternal destiny no matter where the client is in the counseling process. A Christian Leader, whether in the marketplace or sacred setting, will have much of the same concern regardless of the area of endeavor. As a leader in the financial markets, Ralph Doudera calls for attention to one’s spiritual position, condition, and obedience to God in all matters.<sup>28</sup> Distraction has profound effects on portfolios and more. Whether a pastor, counselor, or business leader, they all benefit from a study that enriches their theological framework, enables them to appreciate the work of a pastor-scholar, strengthens their joining of experience to philosophy, and find joy in considering meaning and connection to God and others. Another individual that will gain from this Thesis Project is the researcher.

Specifically, the pastor-scholar-researcher will expand the current base of personal knowledge on the subject of distraction. Recognition of the relationship between the object of study to self through introspection will foster greater awareness, and the Thesis Project will strengthen expertise as a pastor-scholar. The outcome of this investigation will enable the researcher to help others recognize possible distractions in their life. Therefore, the significance of the study will be of benefit to various fields of endeavors as well as practitioners in that area. The framing of the Thesis Project is the consideration of the next section.

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<sup>27</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 2027, Kindle.

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Doudera, *Wealth Conundrum: A Money Manager Wrestles with the Puzzles of Wealth* (Atlanta: Signature Editions, 2006), 155-166.

## Statement of Methodology

The Thesis Project will comprise of research, testing, and reporting. The Introduction orients the reader to the subject under examination by stating briefly the motivation underlying the investigation, and it states the presenting problem, the limitations, the methodology, and the review of literature. Upon this foundation, a summarization informs the reader of the specifics of the testing, reporting the results, drawing conclusions, and presenting the best practices determined by Faith Community Church. The first stage of development centers on examining biblical and literary resources pertinent to the issue of focus, thinking, and behavior. The second stage of development applies the research to the examination of a segment of the church. Building upon this structure, an extrapolation of results come from the empirical data, and finally, the conclusions lead to the truth claims.

In introducing the Thesis Project, the impact of the phenomena of distraction on a church demands attention, and from pastor to a parishioner, ninety-two percent of Americans use a cellular device.<sup>29</sup> The statement of the problem addresses the frequent use of a cellphone in church and the challenges this presents. In doing so, the question is raised of partial attention, distractions, avoidance, information overload, and limited brain capacity. In the Introduction, limitations of time and availability are brought to light, and a brief statement of testing is brought forward. As seen in the Introduction, the method of the project employs qualitative testing, and from the data the researcher extrapolates themes emanating from the shared, lived experiences as reported. The methods employed to arrive at conclusions follow strict protocols to ensure viability, reliability, and credibility. The Introduction (i.e., Chapter 1) puts forward the literary

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<sup>29</sup> Monica Anderson, "Technology Device Ownership: 2015," *Pew Research Center*, October 29, 2015, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/29/technology-device-ownership-2015>.



sources used to inform the Thesis Project. After presenting the foundational elements, the Project moves to delineate the literary research of the problem of distraction.

In the second chapter, literary and biblical research are in sets of meaning (e.g., See Appendix A) which will bring understanding and insight to the subject of distraction. The first set will explore philosophy. The investigation reveals past and current understanding of the phenomena of distraction. Much of the philosophical set is comprised around the phenomena of attention with implications regarding distraction. The second set examines spiritual influences regarding distraction. There are persons, holy and unholy, who have a vested interest in the lived experiences of the participants of the study. The third set is the power of reality (i.e., the here-and-now). This section will analyze the intrusive nature, the desire, and the relief of distraction. The fourth set concerns the physiology of the brain. Neuroscience aids in the inquiry of technological impact on humanness, overstimulation, overload of the brain, continuous partial attention, and the rewiring of the brain of future generations. The fifth set is the environmental impact upon the attention of a person at church. For example, the architectural design aiding in the removal of distraction, the pre-existing conditions prior to a worship experience, programmatic influences contributing to distraction, and historical approaches during moving distraction during worship shape the experience. The final set under consideration considers the practical nature of attention and distraction.

In the third chapter, a segment of Faith Community Church<sup>30</sup> engages in responding to a questionnaire that examines their use, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding their understanding of the phenomena of distraction. The testing includes questions that each respondent can give voice

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<sup>30</sup> Faith Community Church is located in Kissimmee, Florida. It was established in 1974. It is part of Converge (formerly known as Baptist General Conference).

to their belief and practice, and only individuals, eighteen or older, respond to the questionnaire. The respondents range in age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic levels. At no time does the respondent offer any personal information. Each person will take the questionnaire into a room dedicated for the use of testing, and upon completion, the person will drop their answer sheet in a receptacle dedicated for this purpose only. The researcher evaluates each test for completion only (i.e., no interpretation of the data at this point takes place), and puts them under lock and key in a file cabinet in the office. The results are compiled and analyzed by the Precision Consulting Firm based in New York. Compiling data leads to the next section of interpreting the results.

Further in Chapter 3, the findings from the testing are presented in sentence form and supported through tables, graphs, and charts. At times, verbatim responses are stated; however, the reader and researcher is unable to surmise the person's identity being quoted. The research, using the questionnaire, offers a range of replies in conjunction with the number of times a particular response is given. The Precision Consulting Firm of New York is responsible for analyzing the data. Afterward, conclusions articulate the creation of best practices for ministry.

In Chapter 4, a summary of the findings of the Thesis Project concludes the experiment. Closing arguments state the best practices in dealing with the issue of focus based on the reported, lived experiences of congregants and pastors at Faith Community Church. Key points of truth will shed light on the subject that benefits the pastor and congregant alike, and as this technology is continuing to expand, the need for further study is critical.

Again, the purpose of this study is to analyze the link between how a person experiences distraction and its effect upon their perceptions concerning their relationship to God. Each section relates to the overall investigation of distraction. For ease of understanding the Thesis Project, the material is presented in four chapters of introduction, literary and biblical research,

testing results, and conclusions. As in any undertaking, it is impossible to study everything at the same time; therefore, this study does have constraints put on it.

### **Statement of Limitations**

The Thesis Project is a phenomenological study focusing on the lived experiences of congregants at Faith Community Church in Kissimmee, Florida. The project limits to only those living in central Florida. It includes a cross-cultural, gender neutral, multi-generational segmentation.

A limitation of the study focuses only one object (i.e., a cellphone). This study focuses on cellphones which are a recent invention. Not all forms of digital technology (i.e., computers, tablets, and the like) are under examination. This singular device is built upon expertise and equipment that took centuries to develop, but not all devices are readily available and portable like the cellphone.

Another boundary is a questionnaire which limits the process of investigation. The questionnaire frames queries in a positive manner to produce positive results.<sup>31</sup> Limitations include the sample size and demographics of the congregation. Sampled are fifty individuals from the congregation of Faith Community Church. The questionnaire will be offered in English, and any questions that may arise during the testing are answered by the assistants. It assumes an eighth-grade level of reading ability.

A limitation in testing centers on the relationship between the participant and the researcher.<sup>32</sup> This may infringe upon the reliability of the responses as the contributor may wish

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<sup>31</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 4020, Kindle.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 817.

to please the researcher in the process.

Finally, another potential limitation is time and availability. A two week testing period limits the breath of the experiment, and fifty respondents limit the scope of the Thesis Project.

## Review of Literature

### Books

*Change Your Brain Change Your Life* by Daniel D. Amen<sup>33</sup>

As a principal researcher in the medical field regarding neuroscience, Daniel Amen examines brain neuroplasticity, function, impairment, and remedy. He specifically addresses the topic of attention and distraction and offers prescriptive treatment for enhancing the pre-frontal cortex of the brain.

*The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* by Nicholas Carr<sup>34</sup>

Nicholas Carr depicts the alterations of the human brain as a result of continued use of a cellphone. This text attempts to underscore the backlash that is emerging against the internet and more.

*Forgotten God* by Francis Chan and Danae Yankoski<sup>35</sup>

This book text offers a pastoral perspective touching on the subject of focus. Francis Chan laments his struggle with distraction in life, ministry, and the pursuit of God, and his example serves as a means to substantiate the claims of the Thesis Project as it relates to ministry.

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel G. Amen, *Change Your Brain Change Your Life: The Breakthrough Program for Conquering Anxiety, Depression, Obsessiveness, Lack of Focus, Anger, and Memory Problems* (New York: Harmony, 2015) Kindle.

<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010) Kindle.

<sup>35</sup> Chan, *Forgotten God*, Kindle.

*The Digital Invasion* by Archibald D. Hart and Sylvia Hart Frejd<sup>36</sup>

Archibald Hart, a well-received and respected author in the field of counseling, combines the experience of a father and daughter team to analyze how the digital invasion is influencing and changing the fabric of humanity at an alarming rate. The text gives a brief treatment of application to various interests like parenting, addiction, and more.

*Why Motivating People Doesn't Work and What Does* by Susan Fowler<sup>37</sup>

Susan Fowler studies motivation. She concludes that the approach of leadership to date has been misplaced. Studies show how the use of reward in organizations ends in failure. Intrinsic motivation does not need an extrinsic reward to thrive and excel. This book explores the subject-object relationship.

*The Overflowing Brain* by Torkel Klingberg<sup>38</sup>

Klingberg, a pioneer and distinguished researcher in neuroscience, answers the challenge of distractions, brain overload, and function. As a leading global expert, he cautions the dangers surrounding the chemical, structural formation, and alterations in the functioning of the brain. His work informs and supports the significance of the project.

*iBrain* by Gary Small and Gigi Vorgan<sup>39</sup>

As a leading theorist in the field of neuroscience, Small explores the digital divide of

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<sup>36</sup> Archibald D. Hart and Sylvia Hart Frejd, *The Digital Invasion: How Technology is Shaping You and Your Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013) Kindle.

<sup>37</sup> Susan Fowler, *Why Motivating People Doesn't Work and What Does: The New Science of Leading, Energizing, and Engaging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2014), Kindle.

<sup>38</sup> Torkel Klingberg, *The Overflowing Brain: Information Overload and the Limits of Working Memory*, Translated by Neil Betteridge, (New York: Oxford Press, 2009), Kindle.

<sup>39</sup> Small and Vorgan, *iBrain*, Kindle.

Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants. He examines the impact of technology on such things as cyber sex, shopping, email, and much more. Small gives assurance that the best of both worlds of the digital divide will merge and form a new and better functioning brain, albeit a changed brain.

*Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* by John Piper<sup>40</sup>

John Piper, as a pastor and theologian, addresses issues about the minister and the ministry. This treatment serves to give grounding to the project by seeing how even a noted pastor becomes susceptible to distraction. He offers insight into the best practices for both the pastor and the congregant.

*Smarter Than You Think* by Clive Thompson<sup>41</sup>

Thompson takes a contrarian position to the call for care in the digital world. He explores how the brain and its function is developing, and it will change how society shapes itself and how people interact with one another. How the brain interfaces with technology are expanding and opening new horizons that were never dreamt of before. With excitement, Thompson argues for continued, even aggressive, research.

## Bible

Genesis 3:1-6

Distraction from truth dates all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Satan distracts Eve and Adam from what God had said. The result is catastrophic.

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<sup>40</sup> Piper, *Brothers, We are not Professionals*, Kindle.

<sup>41</sup> Clive Thompson, *Smarter Than You Think: How Technology is Changing Our Minds for the Better* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), Kindle.

### Genesis 30:25-43

Jacob places something in front of the sheep that affects their animal husbandry. What is kept in front of the sheep (i.e., attention) affects the health and genetic traits of the flock, and it is a visible reminder to Jacob of God's sovereignty over all the affairs of humanity.

### Deuteronomy 5:32

God through Moses warns, "Do not turn to the right or to the left." Distraction has consequences. Israel's attention is to be continually on God and His command.

### Proverbs 21:2

Self-awareness is possible. All matters are open to introspection by both God and humanity. Moving beyond bias may prove to be most difficult.

### Daniel 1

Attention to knowledge, wisdom, and learning can enhance, sustain, and protect life. Testing, data collection, evidence, conclusions, and truth claims prove Daniel and friends' worldview.

### Joel 1:1-5

There comes a time when one must wake up and face reality, and Joel calls the nation of Israel to do this before it is too late. With a similar sense of urgency, some pastors feel the need to call people to turn away from their little screen and return to God.

### Amos 3:3

For community to exist, consensus requires knowledge, language, conversation, and decision-making. Any equation must consider an element of distraction.

#### Jonah 2:1-9

Jonah experiences ultimate freedom from distraction by being in the belly of a whale. With focus, he turns his attention toward God.

#### Malachi 1:10-14

This is a poignant example of what happens when people offer anything less than pure worship before God. The offering presented is partial attention to what is to be brought to God. The same problem exists today when believers only offer God partial attention.

#### Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus knows the thoughts (e.g., evil thoughts) of humanity and places a question of logic before them to highlight their faulty reasoning. Philosophy must consider truth.

#### Romans 12:1-2

The Apostle Paul instructs a disciple of Christ to be engaged in the renewing of the mind, and from the mind flows worship affecting both body and soul. Conformity to the world presents a powerful distraction from the attention needing to be placed on God alone.

#### 1 Corinthians 2:11

Paul teaches that no one can know their thoughts except the person to whom they belong in the first place. This means that it is possible to know the scope of one's thinking and focus.

#### 2 Corinthians 10:5

A believer is to bring every thought into captivity concerning Christ. The brain does not rest, and it is always processing information, and it requires a conscious effort on the part of a believer to examine thinking and behavior.



Philippians 4:8

Sustained focus is to be the ongoing practice of a believer. The object of that focus is to be true, just, right, pure, lovely, good report, and virtuous. The Apostle Paul says that a believer is to think upon these things with diligence and commitment.

1 Peter 1:13-16

A believer is to take confident action in deciding what to focus their attention upon in their life. It starts in the mind. Thinking must be clear, decisive, and wise.

### **Locating Self**

The pastor-scholar-researcher understands and operates from a particular bias to the issue of distraction in three ways. First, the researcher experiences the problem of diversion by an internal desire to shift attention or by external stimuli causing the need to shift focus. Ori Brafman explains, “These hidden currents and forces include loss aversion (our tendency to go to great lengths to avoid possible losses), value attribution (our inclination to imbue a person or thing with certain qualities based on initial perceived value), and the diagnosis bias (our blindness to all evidence that contradicts our initial assessment of a person or situation).”<sup>42</sup> No person is impervious to having their focus of attention redirected to something else.

Second, the researcher uses a cellphone. Various features aid in carrying out the work of ministry. Bible apps to social-media enable the researcher to have an instantaneous connection to God’s Word and to God’s people. The challenge becomes misuse, good use, or best use.

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<sup>42</sup> Ori Brafman and Rom Braufman, *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 193-198, Kindle.

Lastly, the researcher recognizes the relationship to the participants of the study. The researcher will receive benefit from the participant's involvement, but this symbiotic relationship does not interfere with the possibility of being objective. Nancy Jean Vyhmeister concludes, "Finally, the direct benefit of objectivity in academic writing is that the end product is more accessible to the reader because the signal is clear and understandable. Subjectivity introduces noise that interferes with a clear and accurate reception."<sup>43</sup>

The phenomenological study is analyzing the link between what and how a person experiences distraction and the impact on their perceptions regarding their relationship with God. It is important to locate one's Self and to understand the participant's lived experience.

### **Description of Participants**

The Thesis Project samples individuals of various demographics of Faith Community Church. The age range is eighteen to one-hundred, and the gender is both male and female. Ethnicity will be varied but predominately Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, and Haitian. Socio-economic, political, and religious identity factors will not be a consideration. All of the participants will share an experience of being distracted, in particular, by a smartphone while at church.

### **Collection of Data**

Dissemination of the questionnaire will happen in the lobby of the church by an assistant assigned to the task of oversight of the testing. Each participant will take the questionnaire into a dedicated room, and upon completion, the person will place their answer sheet in a receptacle

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<sup>43</sup> Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 100, Kindle.

dedicated for this purpose. The assistant will collect and deposit the answer sheets into a envelope which is then sealed and stored in a locked cabinet.

### **Analysis of Data**

Outsourcing the analysis of data to a reputable agency (Precision Consulting of New York) will aid in protecting the viability of the data. As this questionnaire is qualitative analysis, utilizing a company specializing in such matters will provide the best possible outcomes for the Thesis Project. The company will provide documentation of findings of the analysis.

### **Authentication of Data**

The company selected before the testing will provide a site where all test results may be submitted via the computer. Precision Consulting will make the results available to the researcher by sending a link and an authentication code for verification. The company will release the results only after proper identification has been authenticated. This ensures due diligence which maintains the integrity of this project.

### **Chapter Summary**

The Thesis Project seeks to bring clarity to the phenomena of distraction by studying influences and undercurrents from various inputs like philosophy, psychology, and theology. Combining these elements with biblical grounding aid in enriching and furthering the discussion of these fields. Through experimentation, this study hopes to analyze the linkage of what and how an individual experiences distraction to perceptions about one's relationship to God. Reliability, credibility, and integrity protect the researcher, participants, experiment, data, evidence, and conclusions throughout the process of the Thesis Project.

So far, the introductory comments look through a telescope to bring into vision the grandeur of the phenomena of distraction. Sir Isaac Newton penned, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on ye (the—mine) shoulders of giants.”<sup>44</sup> Now, attention moves to the microscope to study the intricacies and delicacies of historical and current thought swirling in and through distraction.

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<sup>44</sup> Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Letter from Sir Isaac Newton to Robert Hooke, Simon Gratz Collection (0250a), February 5, 1675, 1, Accessed July 18, 2017, [http://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object\\_id/9285](http://digitallibrary.hsp.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/9285).

## Chapter 2: Elements and Undercurrents of Distraction

### Introduction

Distraction defies definition, and to have one, all-encompassing definition that is suitable for every academic discipline and situation proves elusive to date. Researchers of the Sciences and Humanities study the origins, meaning, ramifications, and results of the phenomena of distraction but fail to provide a sufficient theory holding a definition and construct together.<sup>1</sup> This chapter identifies and analyzes six schools of thought (i.e., Philosophical, Psychological, Biological, Environmental, Theological, and Practical) to frame the problem of distraction.

For example, philosophy explores matters of reason, logic, truth, and the like. Narrowing the focus to phenomenology, coming into view is the study of subjective, human experience. An individual is more than an object to be quantified as in scientific inquiry, and what it means to be human is to understand the subjective experience as it is lived out.

Psychology searches out meaning in the cognitive processes and behavioral actions of an individual. Specifically, gestalt psychotherapy explores the importance of the present reality of an individual. A person does not live in the past, nor the future. One lives in the moment of the here-and-now, and context, as a whole, determines the essence of an experience.

Biology examines the life and living processes. Neuroscience considers the brain and its function. The form and function of the brain are changing as a result of recent technological advancements. Gary Small posits,

The current explosion of digital technology not only is changing the way we live and communicate but is rapidly and profoundly altering our brains. Daily exposure to high technology—computers, smart phones, video games, search engines like Google and

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<sup>1</sup> Melissa DeMore and Lindsey L. Cohen, “Immunization Pain: A Critical Review,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings* 12, no. 4 (December 2005): 282, accessed July 19, 2017, DOI: 10.1007/s10880-005-7813-1.

Yahoo—stimulates brain cell alteration and neurotransmitter release, gradually strengthening new neural pathways in our brains while weakening old ones. Because of the current technological revolution, our brains are evolving right now—at a speed like never before.<sup>2</sup>

Adam Alter contends that “our technology compulsions are damaging our health.”<sup>3</sup> The problem of distraction correlates to the biological function of the human brain, and it is needful to understand existential issues, living in the moment, and physiology in considering the problem of distraction. Three other schools of thought aid in understanding the influences and impact of distraction.

Environmental study observes “the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded.”<sup>4</sup> The environment shapes what an individual believes and how they are to act. This Thesis Project explores perceptions as the person experiences their world and how the environment shapes those perceptions.

Theology teaches that there are spiritual forces at work in the world. God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, angels, and demons all impact humanity. A person’s religious belief influences his or her behavior, and beliefs about God, devotion to Him, and eternal destiny form a worldview from which an individual then interacts with those around him or her.

Finally, practical or pragmatism considers the everyday nature and outcomes of distraction. This section moves from the theoretical to the real. It addresses the day-to-day outworking of the phenomena of distraction.

These six schools of thought approach distraction from a specific starting point. Each provides a framework of a collected body of wisdom relevant to the shared, lived experience of

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<sup>2</sup> Small and Vorgan, *iBrain*, 1, Kindle.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and The Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin, 2017), 69, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup> Merriam-Webster, “Environmental,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 141649, Kindle.

individuals as they face distraction. The analysis of this chapter will move the reader toward a broad understanding of the influences and impacts of each and construct the rationale for the experiment.

### **Philosophical: The Phenomena of Distraction**

Everyone has a philosophy, a world-view, or a way of understanding and interacting with the world. Underneath every philosophy is phenomenology.<sup>5</sup> Every person has a conscience, and it is to this end that phenomenology mainly concerns itself. David Detmer suggests, “A good deal of the interest in phenomenology is due to the fact that it investigates neglected subjects of undeniable importance. One of these is consciousness, which has until recently been widely denied or ignored, largely because it seemingly cannot be studied by the methods of science.”<sup>6</sup> The study of the conscience cannot be quantified, but neither can it be denied. A researcher can not conduct any experimentation without first giving thought from his or her conscience. A philosopher can not philosophize without giving thought to the conscience. An artist, regardless of the medium, displays what is first conceived in the conscience. Phenomenology is useful in that it explores that which can not be reduced to numbers, equations, or scientific methodology. To investigate the conscience is to see life as full of vibrancy, splendor, and brilliance. The tension between science and philosophy began to set into motion the need for someone to bridge the gap.

Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre formulate and champion the theory and practice of Phenomenology and attempt to bridge between the opposites of science and

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<sup>5</sup> David Detmer, *Phenomenology Explained: From Experience to Insight* (Chicago: Open Court, 2013), 18, Kindle.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

philosophy. Husserl, the father of Phenomenology back in the late 1800's to the early 1900's,<sup>7</sup> recognizes the tension and seeks to rectify the problem. Detmer advances,

Husserl's position on this issue is clear and uncompromising. What is lacking, and what is needed, is for philosophy to become a 'rigorous science.'... He suggests that, beginning with the Galilean revolution in science, and intensifying in the wake of the many spectacular successes of the natural sciences, the view has become widespread that genuine knowledge is factual in character, and limited to matters that can be investigated experimentally. The result has been reductionism and alienation. We have lost sight of the richness of human experience— values, meanings, emotions, strivings— in short, human subjectivity in all of its depth and variety. One of the main goals of phenomenology is to restore all of this, without abandoning (indeed, while greatly strengthening) the ideal of philosophy as rigorous science.<sup>8</sup>

Husserl firmly identifies the problem of cold, hard, analytical science which trumps reason, logic, and experimentation over faith, belief, and any spirituality. (However, Husserl's method of reduction will be called into question later.) Leading up to Husserl, Frederick Beiser contends, "The more science advanced, the less room there seemed to be for freedom and God in the universe; and the more philosophy exercised its critical powers, the less authority could be claimed for the Bible, and the old proofs of existence of God, Providence, and immortality."<sup>9</sup> To satisfy any naysayers concerning the validity of phenomenology, Husserl had to provide a robust theory and method of practice to those of science, and for the philosophers of his day, he had to address essence.

Under investigation, then, is the relationship between the subject and object, and it is here that the problem of distraction resides. For Husserl, the essence of the nature of phenomena must move from a series of impressions or an a priori knowledge to experiences that are enduring,

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<sup>7</sup> Stephan Käufer and Anthony Chemero, *Phenomenology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 25, Kindle.

<sup>8</sup> Detmer, *Phenomenology Explained*, 10-11, Kindle.

<sup>9</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (n.p.: Harvard Press, 1987), 2, Kindle.



hardy, and concrete, and in so doing, "...elaborate description of our experience can reveal essential features that have been overlooked by previous philosophers."<sup>10</sup> Logically deduced conditions (e.g., Kantian philosophy) leading to experience does not go far enough to explain the experience itself. Historical, existential, or contemporary phenomenology look at the event of the experience and seek to explain the meaning of the experience through the senses of the subject and the conscious act of the subject toward the object. For example, one may experience attention. That is an act of the conscience. One may experience distraction. That is another act. In Phenomenology, each experience is analyzed by its content, not the fluidity of the acts.<sup>11</sup>

Going further than Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty follow the same lines of argument regarding the conscience but seek to incorporate two critical components, namely the biological and the ecological. Maurice Merleau-Ponty addressing the organic says, "Obsessed with being, and forgetting the perspectivism of my experience, I henceforth treat my experience as an object, and I deduce it from a relation among objects. I consider my body, which is my point of view upon the world, as one of the objects of that world."<sup>12</sup> As such, the subject-object relationship is bridged, and both the subject and object are known. It is through introspection and description (i.e., language) that meaning is attached, and that the location of Self in its nature and form aids in explaining the experience of the conscience. For example, a man lays in a hospital bed dying. Individually, he knows that his body will eventually no longer function, but in facing his fear, he says, appealing to the collective, that "we all die sometime." The fear of death causes one to want to flee, but to live genuinely is to face death with autonomist determination.

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<sup>10</sup> Käufer and Chemero, *Phenomenology*, 25-26, Kindle.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), 73, Kindle.

Heidegger moves beyond the thought (i.e., Husserl) of the experience of death to examining, in depth, the practical aspect of “being-in-the-world.”<sup>13</sup> One may experience death, but it is neither an act nor an object. In similar understanding, distraction may be an experience which is not to be looked upon as an act or object. Historical and existential phenomenology expands further in contemporary thinking.

In historical phenomenology, metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology are understood from the subject’s experience as opposed to the object; however, Derrida, Levinas, Henry, Marion, Chrétien, and others (i.e., modern phenomenologists) shift the importance back and forth between the two, the subject and object. J. Aaron Simmons synthesizes the positions of each by saying, “...the Other is always surprising (Levinas) and requires essential openness (Derrida) such that being put in question by the Other’s call serves to rupture my assumptions of self-sufficiency (Marion) insofar as my being wounded (Chrétien) and or being affected (Henry) opens up new possibilities for moving forward.”<sup>14</sup> Moving forward in the philosophy of the mind are questions of embodiment, perception, intentionality, and more. First-person versus third-person debates will continue to be embroiled in a battle for domination in science and philosophy for years to come. Nature versus Nurture arguments will continue to be problematic in studying the human conscience. Shaun Gallagher argues,

Phenomenology, however, does not start with a theory, or with a consideration of theories. It seeks to be critical and non-dogmatic, shunning metaphysical and theoretical prejudices, as much as possible. It seeks to be guided by what is actually experienced rather than by what we expect to find, given our theoretical commitments. It asks us not to let preconceived theories form our experience, but to let our experience inform and guide our theories.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Detmer, *Phenomenology Explained*, 192-193, Kindle.

<sup>14</sup> J. Aaron Simmons and Bruce Ellis Benson, *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1308-1310, Kindle.

<sup>15</sup> Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 9, Kindle.

It is in the allowing of experience to speak for itself, though some new phenomenologists might resist Husserl's "as such,"<sup>16</sup> that understanding, insight, and wisdom are gained.

Whether historical, existential or contemporary phenomenology, central is the experience of the subject about their world. Some posit that the subject is more important than the object or vice versa. To understand the phenomena of distraction then is to explore how one experiences it, and distraction is not possible if the egocentric Self is the determinate of attention. But, if distraction locates in the other; then, distraction is possible based on the force of the other. Any investigation must be held to the philosophical underpinnings of Phenomenology. Returning to Gallagher, "Phenomenology is concerned with attaining an understanding and proper description of the experiential structure of our mental/ embodied life; it does not attempt to develop a naturalistic explanation of consciousness, nor does it seek to uncover its biological genesis, neurological basis, psychological motivation, or the like."<sup>17</sup> In light of recent thinking,, physiology, psychology, and theology may, in fact, inform and expand the theory and methodology of Phenomenology.

### **Theological: Spirituality and Distraction**

As seen above, there exists a tension in explaining reality between the empirical methodology of the sciences and the phenomenological approach that explains existence through the lived experience. While both endeavors are essential, neither offer a cohesive and comprehensive explanation of origin, meaning, and destiny of a person. Christianity provides a consistent and comprehensible worldview since it starts with God, His perspective, and direction.

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<sup>16</sup> Simmons and Benson, *The New Phenomenology*, 2403, Kindle.

<sup>17</sup> Gallagher and Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, 9, Kindle.

Biblical, systematic, historical, and contemporary theology offer a wide range of various thoughts and proponents, and of these, systematic theology organizes around nine topics that will influence understanding the problem of distraction. These nine topics, Bibliology, Theology Proper, Christology, Pneumatology, Angelology, Anthropology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology, serve as constructs of thought that frame a biblical worldview which inform and surround the problem of distraction.

First, Scripture reveals a God who desires to be known. Paul Enns defines revelation as “that act of God whereby he discloses himself or communicates truth to the mind, whereby he makes manifest to his creatures that which could not be known in any other way.”<sup>18</sup> God wants individuals to know who He is and understand His relationship with them, and in general, God speaks through His natural creation, His mighty acts, and through the conscience. God furthers His communication with humanity in written form. For example, God wrote the Ten Commandments. Language can communicate what God is like in His person and work, and writing aids in the transmission of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The writing of Scripture transcends time. Scripture is inspired and without error.<sup>19</sup> The Bible teaches that God is true.<sup>20</sup> As the Bible is God-breathed,<sup>21</sup> then, it stands to reason that Scripture is true. James Montgomery Boice states, “Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they teach, whether that teaching has to do with doctrine, history, science, geography, geology, or other

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 155.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-169.

<sup>20</sup> 1 John 5:20.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Tim 3:16.

disciplines or knowledge.”<sup>22</sup> By understanding the inspiration, inerrancy, and reliability of Scripture as constructed in Bibliology, the importance of focused attention on the part of humanity towards God is paramount. The consequences of such (or the lack of as in distraction) has profound implications for humankind.

For example, the writing of Scripture was of such importance to God that He commanded every king to make their own personal copy. Scripture records:

Also, it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.<sup>23</sup>

The king was to transcribe, maintain, and read Scripture continuously. In doing so, prolonged life, humility, guidance, and ongoing rule are the results. Specifically, the king is not to be distracted (e.g., not turn aside) from following all that God had said. Distraction would create dire consequences before God.

Theology Proper is the study of God, the Father. His attributes, names, decrees, and more cluster in such a way as to frame knowledge, wisdom, and meaning about God in His person and work. God desires to be known, and yet, in general, humanity suppresses the truth of who God is and His work.<sup>24</sup> Bruce Demarest argues that the Apostle Paul puts forward three central positions regarding this suppression: “First, mankind uniformly repudiates the knowledge of God afforded by general revelation;...man not only spurned the knowledge of God but he proceeds to fashion

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<sup>22</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Does Inerrancy Matter* (Oakland: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1979), 13.

<sup>23</sup> Deut 17:18-20.

<sup>24</sup> Romans 1:18-20.

lifeless gods in the form of men, birds, animals, and reptiles; God, because of man's willful rejection of the light, gave mankind up to their own inventions."<sup>25</sup> This willful refusal and idolatry are readily apparent in how people treat their cellphone. Hart says, "It's almost as if the distractions that we allow the digital world to impose on us is a form of an idol that we worship instead of God."<sup>26</sup> Focused attention on an idol (i.e., a smartphone) may, in fact, be a sin against God. Distraction may be the soul's way of neglecting and rejecting God. Humanity may use a distraction to avoid and reject the specific revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Christology, the study of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, studies Christ as the Savior and Redeemer of humanity. In general revelation, an individual has an a priori knowledge of God in their conscience regarding His power, nature, and morality. In specific revelation, as recorded in Scripture, a person may enter into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In so doing, what may be known about God is now redemptive, and a person enters into an intimate fellowship of the divine nature.<sup>27</sup> Demarest says, "Truth in the head now becomes actualized as truth in the heart involving the whole person."<sup>28</sup> Transformation by Christ affects the entirety of the person. Jesus Christ does not afford a person the ability to dismiss Him and His claims as merely a subject-object, philosophical, or phenomenological discussion. Theologically, Scripture, God, Christ, and the Spirit reveal the unknown God, and in so doing, the righteous demands of the Triune Divinity leave all of humanity without excuse, including distraction. The work of the Holy Spirit illumines the problem.

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<sup>25</sup> Bruce Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 244-247.

<sup>26</sup> Hart and Frejd, *The Digital Invasion*, 187, Kindle.

<sup>27</sup> 2 Pet 1:4.

<sup>28</sup> Demarest, *General Revelation*, 247.

Recorded in Scripture is the person and work of the Holy Spirit (i.e., Pneumatology). The Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.<sup>29</sup> Distraction may be an attempt to block out any work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart. For example, in Acts, Luke records the story of a couple who lie to church leadership. The Apostle Peter confronts their wickedness and states that they have lied not to man but the Spirit. A lie is an attempt to distract from the truth. Distraction may stem from self-deception and selfishness. Distraction, at worst, is a blocking of the work of God in the human heart through the work of the Holy Spirit. Theological reflection studies the Scripture and the Triune God, and it studies what has been created (i.e., Angelology and Anthropology).

Angelology explores doctrines surrounding angels, demons, and Satan. Scripture speaks throughout concerning angels as to their nature, purpose, ministry, and organizational structure. Henry Thiessen, in his systematic theology, states that angels are part of the created order, sustained by God in their existence, knowledgeable though not omniscient, stronger though not omnipotent, and noble but not omnipresent.<sup>30</sup> Angels are ministering spirits sent by God to aid humanity,<sup>31</sup> and as such, angels convey God's directives, carry out His orders, and minister to the needs of people. In opposition to angels, demons (i.e., fallen angels) war against God, holy angels, and people.<sup>32</sup> Satan, the demonic leader, seeks the destruction of humanity, and he constantly tempts people to sin against God. Thiessen states about Satan, "He presents the most plausible excuses and suggests the most striking advantages for sinning."<sup>33</sup> Demons could seek

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<sup>29</sup> John 16:8.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 133-135.

<sup>31</sup> Heb 1:7.

<sup>32</sup> Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 141.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

to distract any person from listening to and obeying God.<sup>34</sup> For example, Saint Matthew records the temptation of Jesus by Satan by offering Him distractions of power, wealth, and the like. These enticements would have seemed plausible and desirous. Any distraction does. It is bad enough that Satan and His ilk seek to destroy the work of God in humanity, but people are bent on their destruction.

The study of Anthropology addresses origin, purpose, suffering, and destiny of the human race. Christianity poses a comprehensive and cohesive answer to these areas of life. Ravi Zacharias maintains that apart from God, humanity is caught in a predicament of determinism and fatalism; so he questions, “Is man determined by the random and mindless processes of time, matter, and chance in interplay, or is there a transcendence to which man can rise above the fatalism that would seem inescapable on humanistic grounds?”<sup>35</sup> Apart from God, the answer to this predicament is in the advancement of technology. Zacharias says, “The savior of technology would come riding on wings of science to rescue us from the claspings teeth of determinism. In short, the antitheist’s answer to pain is technology.”<sup>36</sup> Christianity understands humanities answers lie not within themselves or technology but with God for it is with God that all things move and have their being.<sup>37</sup> The danger is that, as Hart warns, “...we could wake up one day and discover that there is no space left in our lives for God. We define Godspace as a sacred space where we disconnect from our technology and meet God without distractions.”<sup>38</sup> These

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<sup>34</sup> Eph 6:11.

<sup>35</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 170.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Acts 17:22-31, The Apostle Paul claims that which is unknown can be known (contrary to some philosophies); presents God as Creator and the object of humankind’s search; maintains that existence is found in relationship to God; and affirms that our being is dependent upon His being. Paul, referencing art, states that the making of idols is insufficient and ultimately a display of human ignorance. God commands humanity to repent because judgment is coming through the risen Christ.

<sup>38</sup> Hart and Frejd, *The Digital Invasion*, 187, Kindle.



distractions war against the soul and the design for which it is created for in the first place. Self-sufficiency and independence attest to humanities struggle against God, defiance in distraction, and sin upon sin. The remedy resides in a real Redeemer.

Soteriology presents the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Redeemer. The Golden Chain of salvation by Christ (i.e., foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification; Rom 8:28-30) begins in eternity past, moves through the present, and into eternity future.<sup>39</sup> Gordon Lewis points out that when talking about the phenomena of salvation, some theologians believe that existence precedes essence (i.e., existentialism); some focus on the here-and-now experience as opposed to the ever-after life; while others (i.e., Reformed) refute such thinking stipulating that every individual is responsible before God for their sin and must be transformed by the blood of Christ being applied in order to receive eternal life with God.<sup>40</sup> The mental act of belief in the salvific work of Christ is a truth revealed in Scripture. While the object of one's salvation is unseen, the reality is that God is made known through the Son. Scriptural attestation of the person and work of Christ is carefully preserved through the writings and teachings of the Apostles and Early Church. Throughout Church history, repentance, faith, conversion, regeneration, adoption, and more are part of the experience of salvation and are part of the benefits of being saved by Christ. Understanding the basis of salvation leads to a greater understanding of how the Christian life is to be lived. For example, the author of Hebrews exhorts the believer to "lay aside every weight...run with endurance the race...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith"<sup>41</sup> In a footrace, the course begins at the starting block

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<sup>39</sup> Douglass Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 7, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 531.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, vol. 3, *Spirit-Given Life: God's People Present and Future* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 81-84.

<sup>41</sup> Heb 12:1, 2.

and ends at a finish line. A runner removes any encumbrance to increase speed. Nothing is to impede the runner's progress. The runner does not look to the right or left, only to the finish tape. For the Christian, salvation begins at the starting block. No distraction is to hinder any believer from finishing the race set before him or her. Full attention is to be on the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is of Christ, and the believer joins by faith into the activity of God in that salvation. Theologically, God, the Written Word, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit are active in the creation of angels and humanity, and it is with humankind that God turns his attention and provides a way of salvation from sin and its consequences through Jesus Christ. The saved and the redeemed are gathered together into the body of Christ, the Church.

Ecclesiology studies the people of God, the Church. The form and function of the Church are to glorify God, and it is out of love for Him that believers hear and obey the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ.<sup>42</sup> Nothing is to hinder or distract the believer from doing as such. Both the leader and the follower have the same imperative given to them by God and are to search for Him with their whole heart.<sup>43</sup> Distraction could lead a believer into missing a burning bush experience like Moses, shepherds seeing the birth of the Messiah, or the call of Christ to get out of the boat like Peter and come to Him. Distraction can make the heart lukewarm in its love for Christ. Ruth Haley Barton expresses, "Amid the welter of possible distractions, an essential discipline for leaders is to craft times of quiet in which we allow God to show us those things that we might otherwise miss. We need time for the chaos in our soul to settle so that we can turn aside to look at the great sights in our own life and seek understanding about what they mean."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Col 1:18.

<sup>43</sup> Jer 29:13.

<sup>44</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 90, Kindle.

Neither pastor nor congregant would ever want to miss the thrill of being connected to God, but church schedules, endless board meetings, and the like can rob the very soul of the church.

Sadly, there is a day coming when the love of most will grow cold towards God.<sup>45</sup>

Eschatology studies future events. Jesus asks a pointed question about the future, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”<sup>46</sup> Distraction does not require faith, and it keeps a person from considering their final destiny; should that be one of condemnation. However, that very distraction may be what is keeping them from experiencing heaven. There is coming a culmination of all things. For eternity, one will ever be attentive to their eternal destiny, the flames of hell or the splendor of heaven. Scripture speaks to the condition that all humanity is lost and in need of a Savior, and no distraction will ever change that fact.

### **Psychological: Gestalt and Distraction**

As noted earlier, the preeminence of scientific inquiry begins to exert tremendous pressure on philosophers and phenomenologists in applying the rigorous and repeatable methodology in the study of the mind (i.e., Psychology). In response, Wilhelm Wundt establishes the first psychological laboratory at Leipzig, Germany in 1879, and his premise is that analyzing the mind and behavior is no different than studying anything else in nature and must be subject to the same standards of investigation.<sup>47</sup> However, perception, emotions, senses, intelligence, personality, and social issues do not easily conform to the rules and criteria set outlined in the

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<sup>45</sup> Matt 24:12.

<sup>46</sup> Luke 18:8.

<sup>47</sup> Susan Nolen-Hoeksema et al., *Atkinson and Hilgard's Introduction to Psychology*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed. (Delhi, India: Cengage Learning EMEA, 2014), 5.

scientific method. It is not long until many emerging theories and techniques begin to spring up in Europe and America. Gordon Wheeler notes:

The different schools of theories are commonly referred to as waves, the first wave being psychodynamic theories (i.e., Adlerian, psychoanalytic), the second wave learning theories (i.e., behavioral, cognitive– behavioral), the third wave humanistic theories (person-centered, gestalt, existential), the fourth wave feminist and multicultural theories, and the fifth wave postmodern and constructivist theories. In many ways, these waves represent how psychotherapy has adapted and responded to changes in psychology, society, and epistemology as well as to changes in the nature of psychotherapy itself.<sup>48</sup>

Of the various theories, Gestalt theory and therapeutic technique are under consideration.

While psychoanalysis and behaviorism reductionism studies the human experience at an elemental level, Gestalt postulates that the element must be seen as a whole rather than a sum of its part. This wholeness should be described in context. Margaret Korb states, “For a description, three phenomena must be considered: a thing, its context or environment, and the relationship between them. We perceive something that constitutes a part of the reality of our world in terms of the context in which it occurs.”<sup>49</sup> The element is seen not as an individual part but a part of the collective whole which gives it meaning, setting, and connection. How the parts work together and contribute to understanding the subject as a whole only takes on meaning when the subject is seen as an entity in and of itself. For example, a car is more than its parts. The electrical system, fuel system, and body parts (i.e., elements) work together (i.e., relationship) in such a way as to be a car (i.e., Gestalt). Another example, an engagement ring is more than a gemstone set in metal. A diamond is placed in a setting which provides support and protection. The setting highlights as to display the brilliance of the stone, and it is in relationship to the band. Each

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<sup>48</sup> Gordon Wheeler and Lena Axelsson, *Gestalt Therapy*, Theories of Psychotherapy Series (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 77, Kindle.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret P. Korb, Jeffery Gorrell, and Vernon Van De Riet, *Gestalt Therapy: Practice and Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Gouldsboro, ME: Gestalt Journal Press, 2002), 1, Kindle.

element is combined to fashion the engagement ring; however, the significance of it is that is more than a ring. An engagement ring is more than the composite, more than the setting, and more than the pieces coming together. Likewise, to be human is more than a total of our parts. Each element may be studied, but it is insufficient in explaining the whole of the lived experience. Psychoanalysis and behavioral reductionism strip the individual of what it means to be human. Admittedly, such reductionism can be useful; however, what is lost is the *joie de vivre* of the lived experience. Gestalt theory and practice seek to help an individual understand and give meaning to their experience in life, and to do this; key principles must be understood.

Life is to be lived; not dissected, fragmented, or disjointed. To live is to be in the moment, the here-and-now, the ever-present. Life is nothing if not a process of continuous growth and development. Frederick S. Perls, in his seminal work, maintains,

In Gestalt therapy, we are working for something else. We are here to promote the growth process and develop the human potential. We do not talk of instant joy, instant sensory awareness, instant cure. The growth process is a process that takes time. . . . In therapy, we have not only to get through the role-playing. We also have to fill in the holes in the personality to make the person whole and complete again. . . . In Gestalt therapy, we have a better way, but it is no magic shortcut. You don't have to be on a couch or in a Zendo for twenty or thirty years, but you have to invest yourself, and it takes time to grow.<sup>50</sup>

Gestalt theory argues life is in the moment, and endless pursuit of the past, as in psychoanalysis, ends in futility as history can never be relived in the present. Perls explains, “The central task of therapy. . . is not to convince patients to accept arcane interpretations of their ancient history, but to help them come alive to their immediate experience in the present moment.”<sup>51</sup> In this sense, lived experiences are not a string of isolated elements waiting to be dissected and analyzed, but

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<sup>50</sup> Frederick S. Perls, *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*, ed. Joe Wysong (Gouldsboro, ME: Gestalt Journal Press, 2002), 22, Kindle.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

instead, the what and how of these experiences help the individual make sense out of their existence. Gestalt is not merely patchwork being applied to holes in a person's personality or cognition, nor is it a toolbox of interventions ready to be used by a therapist, but instead, it is a theory that seeks to explain life beyond determinism and fatalism.

Another fundamental principle is that the elements must be seen against the background as a whole entity. Korb forwards, "Individuals perceive the environment as a total unit of meaning, responding to the whole of what is seen. This whole is composed of the stimuli to which persons attend directly and those to which they do not attend directly. Focused attention organizes environmental parts into a visual whole, a gestalt that emerges as a figure dominating a field of impressions."<sup>52</sup> Distraction may be understood not as a diversion of attention but rather as a part of the whole experience, and in so doing, distraction becomes a part of a gestalt. For example, a mother is watching her child play in the yard. Her vision may be on the child but in the background is the grass, trees, flowers, and a rattlesnake. The movement of the snake may be said to be a distraction; however, when seen as a gestalt, the child and the snake appear as a unified problem. The mother's attention focuses on a new and more significant issue. Gestalt theory maintains that the figures and ground of the environment must be considered. How the mother acts in the present takes precedence of any prior experience of the past and possible action in the future. Rescuing the infant is a completion of the action against a threat. As a whole, this experience may inform other such experiences in the life as it is lived in the future. A problem arises when the gestalt is not completed.

People can become stuck in the past or paralyzed by the perceived future. What is needed is the capacity for achieving understanding and insight. A gestalt leads to a moment of insight

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<sup>52</sup> Korb et al., *Gestalt Therapy*, 4, Kindle.

which meets the greatest and presenting need in the here-and-now. Through attentiveness and lucidity, the mother in the above example is now able to apply insight gained through this experience to a future situation. Therefore, the need of the moment demands the greatest amount of attention and clarity like a commander on a battlefield.<sup>53</sup> It is in this moment of insight that the Gestalt therapist is seeking to aid the individual in experiencing, acting on, and becoming self-actualized.<sup>54</sup>

Existential issues of being alone, loss, fear, guilt, love, and death can cause a person to view the phenomena of distraction as relief, freedom, and escape. Distraction may serve as a coping mechanism for problems not wishing to be identified or explored. For example, Irvin Yalom, a renowned therapist, when talking about matters of the heart, says, “I believe that the love obsession often serves as a distraction, keeping the individual’s gaze from more painful thoughts.”<sup>55</sup> Distraction, in counseling, serves a purpose and is part of the lived experience of the client. For example, suffering the recent death of her husband to Alzheimer’s, a client sought any form of distraction so that she would not have to deal with the pain of losing her loved one. However, if the need for distraction continues to persist, then the client might not ever move to wholeness or be self-actualized. Sabar points out, “In Gestalt therapy, self-actualization ideally is a process of dynamic self-distribution. Each person is born with an inherent drive and potential to develop her personal nature and talents.”<sup>56</sup> Distraction retards the process of growth and development much like the binding of the feet of a ballerina. Restricting the natural growth

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<sup>53</sup> Stephanie Sabar, “What’s a Gestalt,” in *Gestalt Review* 17, no. 1 (2013): 13, accessed September 6, 2017, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1439533088?pq-origsite=summon&accountid=12085>.

<sup>54</sup> Philip Brownell, *Gestalt Therapy: A Guide to Contemporary Practice* (New York: Springer, 2010), 93-94, Kindle.

<sup>55</sup> Irvin D. Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 401, Kindle.

<sup>56</sup> Sabar, “What’s a Gestalt,” 13.

serves a function but distorts and disfigures the individual. The figure and ground of the person must be understood as it impacts the wholeness of the person. Gestalt therapy seeks to restore, fill in, and make sense of not just the experience but the whole of the person.

Therapeutic intervention enables the client to be able to work on filling the holes in their life by looking at the present encounter with the therapist and how this encounter is structured against prior experience. Ansel Woldt offers a continuum of experience (e.g., sensation, excitement, action, contact, reflection, and withdrawal) that explains what the client is trying to accomplish during the session.<sup>57</sup> Darrell Smith explains the interventions being used as: 1) “communication strategies of the here-and-now, I and thou, I language, and statements versus question;” 2) “experimental strategies of dialogue between polar opposites, completing unfinished existential business through role playing and pillow or empty chair talk, playing the projection, role reversal, exaggeration, feeding a sentence, staying with the pain of the experience, and guided fantasy.”<sup>58</sup> The therapist may choose to work individually with the client or in a group (i.e., still one-to-one work but the group is allowed only to watch the intervention). For example, a forty-year woman describes a long-term, conflictual relationship between her and her mom. The complaint is that her mom never pays attention to her and is always distracted by something else. The therapist selects a participant to play the role of mom and creates a tension between by using opposites of mom saying, “No,” and the daughter saying, “Yes.” The action is only saying that one word with growing intensity and never allowing the daughter to win in volume, passion, and the like. The contact wants to find satisfaction by winning but is thwarted.

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<sup>57</sup> Ansel L. Woldt and Sarah M. Toman, eds., *Gestalt Therapy: History, Theory, Practice* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005), 103-104, Kindle.

<sup>58</sup> Darrell Smith, “Gestalt Techniques,” in *Encyclopedia of Psychology*, ed. David G. Benner (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 466-468.



Reflection on the part of the client speaks to the existential experience of the past and the present seeing it as a whole, lived experience. Then, withdrawal helps to the person to disconnect from the experience but engage better in the future by understanding the here-and-now. Gestalt therapy moves through the continuum to enable the individual to make sense out of the past, understand the hole needing filling, identify the desire or need, and function as a whole. These techniques are not just tools to put into a therapist's toolbox, but a means to create a comprehensive, cohesive lived experience.

### **Intermediate Summary**

Distraction defies a specific, all-encompassing definition. Philosophy, theology, and psychology approach the phenomena of distraction from different frames of reference: philosophy—a humanistic approach to explain existence and meaning, theology—a theistic approach to explain spiritual realities, and psychology—a scientific method to explain mental cognition and behavior.

Phenomenological philosophy and method understand distraction to be part of the lived experience, and while it may not be definable or quantifiable, it is still part of the human condition. What it means to be human, according to historical phenomenologists, is the subject-object relationship exists apart from God. Contemporary phenomenologists take exception and make allowances for the spiritual part of an individual. Simmons states, “Most famously, as explained by Dominique Janicaud (2000), the new phenomenologists ‘go beyond’ historical

phenomenology in their willingness to consider God and religious existence.”<sup>59</sup> Emmanuel Falque maintains, “The more we theologize, the better we philosophize.”<sup>60</sup>

Theologians, then, explain origin, nature, and destiny beyond the humanistic philosophy. God is considered to be the primary cause, and humanity is the effect. Distraction is not a part of God’s nature or action, but instead, it is part of humanity.

Finally, in psychology, what is studied is the mental act and its consequence in human behavior. Gestalt psychology and therapy focus on the wholeness of an experience rather than its parts or sum of the parts. Distraction is more than looking at the causes or consequences for it is part of the essence of being. Yalom points out,

Heidegger spoke of two modes of existence: the everyday mode and the ontological mode. In the everyday mode we are consumed with and distracted by material surroundings—we are filled with wonderment about how things are in the world. In the ontological mode we are focused on being per se—that is, we are filled with wonderment that “things are in the world. When we exist in the ontological mode—the realm beyond everyday concerns—we are in a state of particular readiness for personal change.”<sup>61</sup>

It is out of this potential for change that gestalt becomes particularly viable. Distraction, in Gestalt, is part of the present encounter and structure. These three approaches develop a potential construct of the phenomena of distraction. Biological, environmental, and practical considerations aid in understanding the experience and the essence of distraction.

### **Biological: The Anatomy of Distraction**

Consider for a moment that the human body is a machine, albeit a very complex machine. The body, as a whole, comprises a collection of interworking parts and systems that when

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<sup>59</sup> Simmons and Benson, *The New Phenomenology*, 74-75, Kindle.

<sup>60</sup> Emmanuel Falque, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology*, trans. Reuben Shank (New York: Fordham, 2016), 577.

<sup>61</sup> Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy*, 260-261, Kindle.

calibrated and fine-tuned works with amazing precision and longevity. Every part is a technological wonder. Each system, like the respiratory, digestive, and circulatory system, is a masterpiece of design. When combined in just the right manner, a synergistic piece of equipment emerges, the likes of which is magnificent and unparalleled in form and function. The human body is superlative in creation, and it is a masterpiece of beauty, precision, adaptability, and potential.

If pieces break, then fix it. If a part wears out, then swap it out. If a system fails, then replace it. Technology demands refinement, upgrade, and modernization. Every piece, component, and system is open to inspection. All pieces must be identified, labeled, and categorized. Every part requires examination of its support to the whole, and each system necessitates scrutiny for its maximization of energy. Everything works to the advancement of humanity. However, something is amiss; this machine requires ongoing energy.

If the human body is a closed system (i.e., only has so much energy), then it is only a matter of time before entropy ensues. But, if it is an open system (i.e., the cycle of replenishing energy), then it will last as long as the closed system of the universe. Isaac Asimov, writer, and professor, poses this fundamental problem of the biology of the human race in his literary masterpiece, *The Last Question*.<sup>62</sup> There is a limit to energy in the body and universe. As the body only has so much energy, focused attention must be mastered to achieve maximum efficiency. For example, an athlete must remove all distractions to focus on technique and performance so that there is no wasted energy. Any distraction is a reduction of energy.

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<sup>62</sup> Isaac Asimov, "The Last Question," in *Isaac Asimov: The Complete Series*, Vol. 1 (New York: Broadway, 1990), 290-300.

Distraction is a result of a flaw. Scientific testing of the brain (e.g., MRI, fMRI, CAT, PET, qEEG, and SPECT<sup>63</sup>) reveals that the Prefrontal Cortex of the brain is responsible for attention, and when damaged, either from congenital disability or injury, problems occur of “short attention span, distractibility, lack of perseverance, lack of impulse control, hyperactivity, and more.”<sup>64</sup> With modern testing methods, it is now possible to learn and understand the inner workings of the brain, and these scans provide a means to test without invasiveness. For example, Attention Deficient Disorder can be studied through testing. The behavior of distractibility can be mitigated. The study of neuroscience holds a promising future for diagnosing and treatment of this flaw in human behavior. Distraction reduces energy, poses a problem, and can feed into addiction.

Science is now beginning to understand and prove that addiction is far more than substance abuse, and many researchers are starting to look at behaviors that present a similar manner as drug dependency. Alter states, “Behavioral addiction consists of six ingredients: compelling goals that are just beyond reach; irresistible and unpredictable positive feedback; a sense of incremental progress and improvement; tasks that become slowly more difficult over time; unresolved tensions that demand resolution; and strong social connections.”<sup>65</sup> Many researchers are now beginning to see a correlation between the use of technology (i.e., the smartphone) and addiction. Archibald Hart argues, “Internet addiction is probably the most common and fastest-growing addiction of our modern time. Internet use, overuse, and abuse have been among the most concentrated areas of psychological investigation for the past ten

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<sup>63</sup> Amen, *Change Your Brain*, 122, Kindle.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-172.

<sup>65</sup> Alter, *Irresistible*, 9, Kindle.

years.”<sup>66</sup> By comparison, the use of cellphones is similar to the use of an illegal drug. There is a supply chain from manufacturer to end user. Technology creates in such a way as to keep the individual hooked on using the product. It will even go so far as creating a virtual world to keep the person engaged. Virtual Reality offers a means to enhance and control the experience. Alter asks, “Why live in the real world with real, flawed people when you can live in a perfect world that feels just as real?”<sup>67</sup> Crawford concurs by saying, “...the pioneers of virtual reality research were animated by a wish to explore the possibilities of experience without the limits that define us as humans.”<sup>68</sup> Designers of games latched quickly onto this idea by creating experiences that endlessly loop and seamlessly move the senses of the physical body to the virtual world. Distraction feeds the addiction. Be distracted endless hours, days, and weeks is possible. Virtual Reality offers a method by which distraction is controlled, enabled, modified, engaged, and intensified by providing goals, positive feedback, tasks, tension, and relationships. It is not a far reach to understand and see that this generation as being the most distracted and addicted generation ever.

The human body experiences distraction as a loss of power, impairment of cognitive function, and as highly addictive. Also, distraction fatigues the human anatomy. Any machine must be tested for its endurance over time. Stress can cause a machine to break. Like stress fractures to the bone, distraction may crush, fragment, splinter, and break an individual.

The central processing unit (i.e., the brain) is being overworked, overloaded, and overstressed. A distracted driver is more likely to be involved in an accident. The person texts, talks, searches, and stores up information unrelated to the driving of the vehicle. By being

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<sup>66</sup> Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, 132, Kindle.

<sup>67</sup> Alter, *Irresistible*, 142, Kindle.

<sup>68</sup> Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head*, 167, Kindle.

distracted, the selection of attention overloads the focus and memory of the individual. Klingberg says, “As advances in information technology and communication supply us with information at an ever accelerating rate, the limitations of our brains become all the more apparent. Boundaries are defined no longer by technology but by our biology.”<sup>69</sup> Another example is how people get very stressed if not connected to their smartphone. Alter states, “This sort of overuse is so prevalent that researchers have coined the term ‘nomophobia’ to describe the fear of being without mobile phone contact (an abbreviation of “no-mobile-phobia”).”<sup>70</sup> Many individuals find it very difficult, if not impossible, to disconnect from their phone. A client complains that her husband constantly wears his phone, sleeps with his phone, and loves his phone. He is never without it. He is constantly using it, playing with it, looking at it, picking it up, and listening for it. In a twenty-four-hour period, he is connected to it for twenty-five. Another example, an employee is bombarded by information to the point of complaining about being on the edge of a nervous breakdown. There is the feeling of being powerless against the onslaught of emails, phone calls, text messages, and instant messaging. Technology has provided instant contact but at a price, and it is seen as a loss of control. The phenomena of distraction of the subjective experience of the individual are empowered and controlled by the physiological response to the phenomena. Distraction becomes either a deficit or a state of hyper-vigilance. The human body is not designed for such abuse in either direction. Richard Swenson elaborates, “We are not infinite. The day does not have more than twenty-four hours. We do not have an inexhaustible source of human energy. We cannot keep running on empty. Limits are real, and despite what

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<sup>69</sup> Klingberg, *The Overflowing Brain*, 3, Kindle.

<sup>70</sup> Alter, *Irresistible*, 15, Kindle.

some stoics might think, limits are not even an enemy. Overloading is the enemy.”<sup>71</sup> Distraction fatigues the body, demands constant replenishing of energy, impairs brain activity, addicts the body to stimulation, and hampers productivity.

The phenomena of distraction are diminishing competencies which, in turn, affects productivity.<sup>72</sup> The body is efficient. It can carry out effectively what it is designed to do. Mobility, self-sustainment, adaptation, and more are functional capacities and results of a well-organized and useful machine. However, distraction reduces output. For example, a student is about to take a test in school. The night before the exam the student plays games on the computer, texts on the phone, and stares at a blue screen for hours. The parents denounce such activities as distractions resulting in loss of sleep, a waste of time, inattentiveness, and more. The final result is a lack of mastery of information and skill. Distraction robs the human body of reaching its fullest capacity of performance. Regardless of being stimulus-driven, the result is the same. Distraction leads to system overload, malfunction, stress, and system failure.

The question now arises of how the environment impacts the subject concerning the phenomena of distraction. Crawford maintains that “the root of attention is selection: we pick something out from the flux of the available.”<sup>73</sup> Humanity is the only life form on earth that seeks out understanding its existence and how it relates to the world.

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<sup>71</sup> Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2004), 56, Kindle.

<sup>72</sup> Edie Williams, “Driven to Distraction,” in *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 14, no. 4 (2012): 627. Accessed September 22, 2017, DOI 10.1177/1523422312455627.

<sup>73</sup> Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head*, 86, Kindle.

### **Environmental: The Background of Distraction**

Consideration must be given to the background of experience. The setting, context, or environment contours the whole. In art, a masterpiece is placed in the right setting. Colors, texture, lighting and more influence the showcasing of a piece of work. In hermeneutics, a text without a context is a pretext. The context surrounds a word and aids in bringing it into existence. In jewelry design, a diamond sparkles in the right setting. The wholeness of the ring is dependent on the clarity of the stone against the complementary background. Similarly, distraction does not happen in a vacuum. The human brain processes distraction while the setting shapes the experience.

Concerning the environmental aspect, biology is not the sole determinate of the phenomena of distraction. Nobel Prize winner, biologist Eric Kandel, states,

Thus, even though I had long been taught that the genes of the brain are the governors of behavior, the absolute masters of our fate, our work showed that, in the brain as in bacteria, genes also are servants of the environment. . . . The fact that a gene must be switched on to form long-term memory shows clearly that genes are not simply determinants of behavior but are also responsive to environmental stimulation, such as learning.<sup>74</sup>

The environment must not be excluded because it is outside the realm of the subject. Even though there is no object of the phenomena of distraction, the lived experience of the subject includes its interaction with the world beyond. For example, in reading this paper, the brain is changing as new learning is taking place. Carr says, "...the growing body of evidence makes clear that the memory inside our heads is the product of an extraordinarily complex natural process that is, at every instant, exquisitely tuned to the unique environment in which each of us

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<sup>74</sup> Eric R. Kandel, *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of the Mind* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 264-276, Kindle.



lives and the unique pattern of experiences that each of us goes through.”<sup>75</sup> So, an individual is effected by their surroundings, and every individual will experience distraction differently.

Every person will attend to their surroundings through attention. Klingberg offers three types of attention: “controlled attention, stimulus-driven attention, and arousal.”<sup>76</sup> Controlled attention is the focusing of the mind on a particular task like reading. Stimulus-driven attention is the response of the mind toward the outside world that is unconscious and reflexive like noticing a snake moving in the grass. The person reacts to the unexpected. Arousal, in a similar fashion to stimulus-driven, responds to the unexpected but differs in that it is non-specific, and it is the subject’s interaction with the environment over a period and intensity. Reading requires controlled attention. A cat jumps into the lap of a reader which is unexpected and stimulus-driven. Reading over a long period of time may cause fatigue or excitement. The person waxes and wanes in their arousal. As such, an individual will have a unique experience interacting with their environment. Every person will have varying degrees of attention to the stimuli around him or her. Further explanation and illustration will aid in explaining the phenomena of distraction as related to the environment.

Controlled attention in the worship of God can be seen in church architecture. Frank Viola argues, “Exegete the architecture of a typical church building, and you’ll quickly discover that it effectively teaches the church to be passive. The interior structure of the building is not designed for interpersonal communication, mutual ministry, or spiritual fellowship.”<sup>77</sup> The point here is not to argue his interpretation of church architecture, but to acknowledge that focused

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<sup>75</sup> Carr, *The Shallows*, 190, Kindle.

<sup>76</sup> Klingberg, *The Overflowing Brain*, 21, Kindle.

<sup>77</sup> Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 1084, Kindle.

attention is part of the equation. For example, Gothic architecture attempts to aid the worshipper by drawing attention heavenward. An elevated pulpit encourages the worshipper to see the message as central and to focus attention on the spoken word. Controlled attention enables the mind to focus on the object for an extended period to process as much information as is necessary to understand the experience.

Stimulus-driven attention in the worship of God can be seen in Scripture. Moses, as noted earlier, experiences the phenomena of distraction as his attention is diverted from caring for a flock of sheep to seeing a stimulus-driven event. God causes a bush to be set on fire but not consumed (i.e., the object of diverted attention).<sup>78</sup> His controlled attention of caring for the sheep redirects to stimulus-driven attention in response to an unexpected burning bush. Attention is diverted and reassigned in response to an unexpected event. This premise is the basis of advertising, marketing, and more, and it is explored in greater detail following.

Arousal attention in the worship of God can be viewed in the lived experience of a worshiper at church. One can be bored at church or completely focused at church. Viola remarks that he "...became painfully bored with Sunday-morning church services."<sup>79</sup> Others are remarkably engaged. For example, Bill Hybels has released the passion of thousands of worshippers at Willow Creek by creating venues for which they can utilize their giftedness through acts of service and love.<sup>80</sup> Arousal tends to pendulum swing between polar opposites of boredom and high engagement.

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<sup>78</sup> Exod 3:3.

<sup>79</sup> Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 39-40, Kindle.

<sup>80</sup> Bill Hybels, *The Volunteer Revolution: Unleashing the Power of Everybody* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 34, Kindle.

Understanding how a person experiences controlled, stimulus-driven, and arousal attention has direct bearing upon how a person is influenced by their environment. Still further, the shaping of the environment impacts and extends the experience and self.

Technology offers to the human experience a means by which a person can extend beyond their capacities and capabilities. Consider a knife. Balance, strength, precision, sharpness, and craftsmanship mark a cutlery knife. When wielded by a cook, the knife becomes an extension of his being and extends his arm in such a way as to think the two are one. The cook looks at himself functioning with the knife in such a way as to perceive himself to be a master chef who is working with skill and grace.<sup>81</sup> Carr says, “The tight bonds we form with our tools go both ways. Even as our technologies become extensions of ourselves, we become extensions of our technologies.”<sup>82</sup> The object (i.e., the knife) is beyond the subject (i.e., the cook). The object in the environment shapes the function and persona of the individual.

A smartphone is a piece of technology that shapes a person’s lived experience. Held at the end of the arm, it affords the person the opportunity to connect to the world beyond them that is both meaningful and satisfying. Playing the part of a gun slinger, the cellphone becomes to the person a make-believe weapon that is pulled from its holster with speed and dexterity, and to a small child, smartphone use makes her feel grown up like her mommy. This device is more than simply a phone. It defines status, intellectual prowess, and culture.

The dark side of technology is that it can take over a person’s life. The tentacles of the environment can entwine around the individual slowly, imperceptibly, and diabolically. Swenson says, “Much modern advertising is aimed to induce peer coveting. If fifteen-year-olds see their

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<sup>81</sup> Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head*, 31-35. Kindle.

<sup>82</sup> Carr, *The Shallows*, 208, Kindle.

friends with designer Jordan shoes, the hottest fashion, or the latest technology, it is expected this will begin a cascade of coveting — not just admiring the item, but excessively desiring it to the point of fixation. In extreme instances, teens have killed peers for their shoes, jackets, or phones.”<sup>83</sup> The environment of the phenomena of distraction turns from a passive force to an active agent that persuades an individual toward good or evil. The argument that technology is unbiased and amoral is not valid in the realm of the internet, gaming, and smartphone. Distraction is no longer a symptom of a problem, but rather, it is the drug of choice by today’s technophile.

By design, playing games are addictive to the subject on any digital platform. Shigeru Miyamoto is a leader in the field of gaming and understands just how addictive technology can become to a subject.<sup>84</sup> His creations rank as tops in the field. Recently, his games were re-released creating a market frenzy. This author noted that people lined the streets, spent the night camping out, and endured great pains to ensure the opportunity to get their fix (i.e., copy of the top-selling games). Small posits, “When we think of addiction, we usually associate it with alcoholism or drug abuse. However, the same neural pathways in the brain that reinforce dependence on those substances can lead to compulsive technology behaviors that are just as addictive and potentially destructive.”<sup>85</sup> The point is that an object in the environment acts upon the subject in such a way as to create an addiction. What is seen as an innocuous help in creating distraction for the subject turns into a full-blown possibility of addiction to distraction through the use of the technological instrument. This is particularly true of a smartphone. The reason this

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<sup>83</sup> Richard Swenson, *Contentment: The Secret to a Lasting Calm* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2013), 1919-1922, Kindle.

<sup>84</sup> Alter, *Irresistible*, 147-149, Kindle.

<sup>85</sup> Small, *iBrain*, 48, Kindle.

is so is because of its availability and mobility. At one point, Internet use was confined to a computer which took up the size of a room. Over time, computers quickly reduced in size while memory and application expanded. Today, a smartphone is equipped with speed, functionality, and mobility which means that the addictiveness of distraction offered by technology has the potential for millions of people to be the most distracted generation ever.

There are those who would disagree with this assessment. Thompson says, “Our digital environments likely offer a similar push and pull. We tolerate their cognitive hassles and distractions for the enormous upside of being connected, in new ways, to other people.”<sup>86</sup> The discussion will continue over the impact of technology, but what is certain is that our distractions from the existing environment have an affect on us. Reinke says, “As digital distractions intrude into our lives at an unprecedented rate, behavioral scientists and psychologists offer statistical proof in study after study: the more addicted you become to your phone, the more prone you are to depression and anxiety, and the less able you are to concentrate at work and sleep at night.”<sup>87</sup> Contrary to dissenters, distraction changes our physiology, mental capacities, and functions, and it forms the lived experience of the individual. The environment shapes the experience, and the experience shapes the environment.

What is learned from the environment concerning the phenomena of distraction is this: the subject is influenced, changed, and shaped by the lived experience while interacting with the environment. North postulates, “Distraction is diversion, and diversion is a version of attention.”<sup>88</sup> Attention by the subject is controlled, stimulus-driven, or arousal. The object in the environment is an extension of the individual’s experience with the environment. Distraction

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<sup>86</sup> Thompson, *Smarter Than You Think*, 15, Kindle.

<sup>87</sup> Reinke, *Twelve Ways Your Phone is Changing You*, 631-633, Kindle.

<sup>88</sup> North, *The Problem of Distraction*, 6, Kindle.

may cause a person to lose track of time and surroundings due to the object drawing attention. The subject may desire the distraction, or it may have nefarious intent by those who wish to exert control, extract something of worth, or manipulate the interaction for personal gain. The phenomena of distraction, whether real or virtual, is taken in through the senses and changes the person as a result. Distraction may leave a person feeling engaged, encouraged, and helped, or it can leave a person feeling disassociated, preyed upon, and powerless. As seen above, the environment is not inactive but active in shaping the lived experience regarding the phenomena of distraction. The question arises of what practical nature is the understanding of the experience of the subject.

### **Practical: The Action of Distraction**

Philosophers theorize and intellectualize the problem of distraction. Psychologists study the working of the distracted mind conceptually, and theologians examine how distraction affects the soul. Biologists reduce the problem as far as the molecular level in the human body, and environmentalists see the phenomena of distraction everywhere. However, practically, one must push beyond concepts, theories, and the like. In this view, the lived experience of an individual is more than a theory or philosophy. The elusiveness of definition to date regarding the phenomena of distraction points out the need to move beyond theoretical constructs and antecedent ideas. This down-to-earth viewpoint aims at what works, explains distraction pragmatically, and moves from theory to reality. The phenomena of distraction must be studied in its usefulness, validity, definability, uniqueness, affordability, and verifiability.

First, distraction is useful. It diverts attention. For example, in the treatment of ODD (i.e., Oppositional Defiant Disorder), Amen makes use of distraction as a therapeutic intervention.<sup>89</sup> In his research, Klingberg uses distraction in his work with children diagnosed with ADHD (i.e., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).<sup>90</sup> Manufacturers of smartphones understand the usefulness of distraction. Reinke confides, “I have since discovered that my omnipresent iPhone is also corroding my life with distractions— something Apple execs unwittingly admitted on the eve of the launch of the Apple Watch, marketed as a newer and less-invasive techno-fix to all the techno-noise brought into our lives by the iPhone.”<sup>91</sup> From counseling to marketing, distraction proves to be very useful in moving an individual toward the desired end. The fact that people can be distracted makes distraction useful to people. For example, a person can be distracted in listening to music. It can make an unpleasant task more bearable as a result. Going to the dentist and having a cavity filled is made more tolerable by listening to music. The benefit of the phenomena of distraction resides in its utility.

Second, distraction is a valid life experience. Whether distraction is labeled as a part of attention, diversion, or continuous partial attention, there is validity to the phenomena. It may be beyond measurement or quantification, but distraction is no less real and a part of the fabric of the lived experience of the individual. The credibility of distraction is of such importance that Archibald Hart foresees potential harm to an individual through the use of technology when he says, “We believe the time is coming where your smartphone, iPad, and such will come with a warning label stating, ‘Excessive use of this digital device could be hazardous to your health.’”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Amen, *Change Your Brain*, 222, Kindle.

<sup>90</sup> Klingberg, *The Overflowing Brain*, 116-122, Kindle.

<sup>91</sup> Reinke, *Twelve Ways Your Phone is Changing You*, 211, Kindle.

<sup>92</sup> Hart, *The Digital Invasion*, 129. Kindle.

The phenomena of distraction poses a believable threat. Distraction is not merely the opposite of attraction for it must be stronger than attention to divert the attention in the first place. As such, distraction proves useful, valid, and definable (i.e., practically speaking).

By definition, as noted under Terminology, distraction is to direct or redirect attention to a different object. This working definition is concise, precise and consistent against a broad spectrum of experiences. Kandel explains,

To develop productive insights into consciousness, the new science of mind first had to settle on a working definition of consciousness as a state of perceptual awareness, or selective attention writ large. At its core, consciousness in people, is an awareness of self, an awareness of being aware. Consciousness thus refers to our ability not simply to experience pleasure and pain but to attend to and reflect upon those experiences, and to do so in the context of our immediate lives and our life history. Conscious attention allows us to shut out extraneous experiences and focus on the critical event that confronts us, be it pleasure or pain, the blue of the sky, the cool northern light of a Vermeer painting, or the beauty and calm we experience at the seashore.<sup>93</sup>

The study of the phenomena of distraction must start from some point to even begin discussing what distraction is. For example, when a person believes he or she has experienced distraction, what is meant is that there was a diversion of their attention, regardless of the duration or intensity. Distraction is not only understood pragmatically but also uniquely.

Everybody experiences distraction distinctively. No two individuals are exactly alike. Practically, every person is singular in identity, experience, history, and culture. Each person may experience the same distraction, but the interpretation and assimilation will be unique to the individual. The underlying premise is that every person has the freedom to choose how to integrate the experience into his or her life. Crawford says, “How we act is not determined in an isolated moment of choice; it is powerfully ordered by how we perceive the situation, how we are attuned to it, and this is very much a function of our previous history of shaping ourselves to

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<sup>93</sup> Kandel, *In Search of Memory*, 376-377, Kindle.



the world in a particular way.”<sup>94</sup> Many components shape the lived experience of an individual. For example, listening to music while working for one person might be distracting, and yet to another, it is not distracting at all. Anatomy might explain the difference. One might be hearing impaired. Culturally, one might like loud music while another likes it softer. Historically, one may have been scolded as a child for listening to music while working on homework. These contributing influences exert power over how the phenomena of distraction are experienced uniquely. Distraction is unique to the person, understood at a practical level, and relevant to the lived experience of an individual, and affords the person with a sort of payoff.

Economically, distraction can be as cheap as a penny or as expensive as diamond bracelet. Distraction affords a subject something of worth. The person may stand to gain emotional distancing, time to think or decide, a point of hesitation so as to not react in haste, or more. Distraction provides the subject with something of value to the individual. Being pleasantly distracted is a feeling brought on by the economic of the situation or object. Likewise, distraction may extract a toll on the individual. Some may not wish to pay the high price of being distracted. For example, a sentry is commanded to watch for any breach of security at the gate. Distraction by an enemy might be disastrous. In this supposed case, the sentry might face reprimand, court marshal, or relieved of duty or command. Economics examines the utility or usefulness of a transaction. Pragmatics of the distraction looks at the transaction in the same manner.

Lastly, the phenomena of distraction are verifiable. To think requires a brain. Neural activity in the brain, beginning at conception and ending at death, validates the existence of thought (i.e., distraction). During medical school, Majid Fotuhia fondly speaks of how the brain

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<sup>94</sup> Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head*, 75, Kindle.

is shaped and altered by human experience, and she says, “In between the moment she’d first seen those bright delivery-room lights and the moment her last neuron had fired, every experience her brain had encountered shaped the person she became.”<sup>95</sup> As the doctor points out, the patient’s brain shaped her experience, and every experience shapes her brain. This interaction proves that distraction does exist as part of the human experience. Second, interaction with other individuals verifies the problem of distraction. For example, two women meeting over a cup of coffee engage in conversation. One complains to the other that she is not listening to her. She seems distracted. Distraction is verified by the other person’s experience and conclusion. Third, distraction is verified by self-report. For example, a boy tells his mom that he was bored at school. When asked about the experience, the child speaks of numerous distractions from other students. The biological response, subject-to-subject interaction, and self-report verify the lived experience of the phenomena of distraction. Practically, distraction is verifiable, economical, unique, definable, valid and useful.

### Chapter Summary

Distraction poses a problem. Defining an intangible proves to be elusive at best and insufferable at worst. Philosophy has for millennia constructed theories and frameworks for understanding attention, but little time and thought is given to distraction. North says,

It is difficult to isolate distraction as a philosopheme that emerged within a specific historical horizon, as though it were an empirical event in the history of thought. This seems to be because it acts as the mental corollary of historical horizons themselves, and so it has no history of its own. It is hard to catch because, as a tendency toward the limit of what is, distraction is nearest when it escapes notice and most remote when attended to.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Majid Fotuhi and Christina Breda, *Boost Your Brain: The New Art and Science Behind Enhanced Brain Performance* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 316-380, Kindle.

<sup>96</sup> North, *The Problem of Distraction*, 12, Kindle.

There is no line of thought that is consistent over time regarding the phenomena of distraction. Yet, it is part of everyday life and experience. There is no object that is beyond the subject that can be labeled as a distraction. It has no size, dimension, color, weight, or the like, but it is part of the lived experience of a person.

Six areas broaden out understanding the phenomena and its location in human experience. These six areas encompass the study of phenomenology, theology, psychology, biology, environmental, and pragmatics.

As noted above, Phenomenology studies the lived experience of the individual. It concentrates on the what and how of an experience rather than the why of the experience. Phenomenology relies on self-report to define, elaborate, and express the experience of distraction. Researchers look for commonalities and differences in a shared experience of numerous subjects. Even though an experience defies scientific methodology and experimentation, it does not mean that the experience is any less valid or real. Therefore, phenomenologists explain distraction as part of the lived experience and can only be understood through the communication of the subject as they interpret or understand their experience.

A theologian differs with a phenomenologist as he or she might be much more open to the spiritual realm influencing the spiritual realm. Modern phenomenologists are allowing for the spiritual part of the lived experience as long as it does not take away from the humanness or is dogmatic. Holy and unholy influences are present and acting upon the individual, and systematic theology aids in highlighting these influences. Distraction is believed to serve a purpose that is dependent on the origin of that diversion. Distraction, then, can move one closer to God or further away from Him. If a person can be distracted individually, then a society can be

distracted collectively. If a saint can be distracted, then the church can be distracted. Such are the musings of a theologian.

Psychologists set out to understand the mind. Identity, integration, differentiation, and more are fodder for understanding personality, behavior, and development. Psychoanalytic, behaviorism, cognitive, and gestalt construct theories and therapies of the formation of the mind, experience, dependence, freedom, attention, and more. Specifically, Gestalt focuses of the here-and-now of an experience rather than the past or future of an experience. It looks at the holes created during the formation of personality and seeks to fill those holes through Gestalt therapy. What emerges is a person that is now whole and greater than the sum of their total experiences. The study of the workings of the mind must include the body as it is part of the totality of what it means to be human.

Biology seeks to understand the physical brain. The human body takes in information through the senses and processes that information within the brain. Over time, the wonder of the human body has been reduced to machination. If a part fails, replace it. Distraction may be seen as a loss of power, impairment, fatigue, overload, and more to the overall functionality of the brain. The stress placed on the system can cause permanent harm and eventually create the system's demise. Distraction has profound effect on the entire body. Biology locates the effects within the subject while environmental examines the surrounding background locating distraction beyond the subject.

Distraction is a force acting upon the subject in such a way as to divert attention. It is more powerful than attention because it has to overcome the force of attention and redirect it elsewhere. The environment of distraction shapes the lived experience of the subject. Technology is an extension of the subject taken from the environment. The subject possesses

controlled, stimulus-driven, or arousal attention to the background of the object. Understanding this about attention and the human response to distraction enables makers of devices like a smartphone or virtual reality eyewear program to develop very addictive applications. The distraction now becomes the focus of attention.

Lastly, examining distraction requires understanding the practical aspect of distraction. Useful, valid to life experience, unique to the individual, economic in cost, and verifiable, the phenomena of distraction enable the diversion of attention by the subject onto an object, thought, or feeling to derive a benefit from the redirection. The phenomenological study of distraction, combining the six areas of interest, examines the lived experience of people of Faith Community Church.

## **Chapter 3: Data Analysis**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to analyze if there is a link between how a person experiences distraction and its effect upon their perceptions concerning their relationship to God. Distraction at church during a worship service can affect one's relationship to God and others. Personal motivations, pre-existing conditions, and duration of time contribute to how a person will interact with a disturbance of attention. Factors of biology, technology, values, and mores can influence the power of partial attention.

The Thesis Project was a phenomenological study focusing on the lived experiences of congregants at Faith Community Church in Kissimmee, Florida. Due to limitations of time and availability, the thesis project concentrated on a sample group of fifty people at Faith Community Church, which included a cross-cultural, gender neutral, multi-generational segmentation. Only individuals, eighteen or older, responded to the questionnaire, and at no time did the respondent offer any personal information. Each person took the questionnaire in a room dedicated for the use of testing, and upon completion, the person dropped their answer sheet in a receptacle dedicated for this purpose only.

The impact of this study can potentially increase the understanding of distraction and its effect upon a congregation. This study explored if a correlation exists between an object (i.e., smartphone), the subjective experience of distraction by individuals, and a resulting impact on the perception of one's spiritual journey. The researcher asked the primary research question of "what and how" do individuals of Faith Community Church experience distraction. As individuals, the research study explored the subjective experience of each and analyzes the shared, objective experience of the group concerning the issue.

The following section contains the presentation of the study findings.<sup>1</sup> This section is divided into two main sections, in which the two facets of the research questions are addressed: how a person experiences distraction and perceptions about participants' relationship to God. Within each of these main sections, major themes – and concurring subthemes - are addressed.

### Section One: How a Person Experiences Distraction

Within this first section, there were four major themes: Defining Distraction, Distractions and Causes at Church, Feelings about Distractions, and Overcoming Distractions at Church.

#### **Theme 1: Definition of Distraction**

The first major theme was definition of distraction, wherein congregants explained how they understood the concept of distraction. Twenty-three of the fifty respondents defined distraction within the same framework – as an interruption that causes one to lose focus or divert attention from the task at hand. P1 simply demarcated distraction as “not paying attention” while P13 described it as “Anything that blocks your focus.” The word focus was expressed repeatedly. P19 termed distraction as something “to stop me from focusing in the Lord and the job for him,” and P20 noted distraction involves “not being able to focus on service.” Similarly, P21 explained distraction as “Something that keeps me from my complete focus; P30 likewise described it as “Something to take away from the focus that you have in mind,” and P4 labelled distraction as “Something or anything that takes you out of focus.” Lose of focus was outlined by P5, as well: “Distraction is anything to differ your focus to something not as important to your main goal. Anything that makes you lose control of yourself or your focus is distraction.”

The other linguistic reiteration within this main theme was “attention.” Much like a lack

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<sup>1</sup> Precision Consulting Company, *Report Marcy Results 122917*, Clark Guo.

of focus, congregants described distraction as taking away their attention from their goal or target – whether that is church-based or not. P34 used both the words “focus” and “attention” to define distraction, saying “Anything that pulls my attention from what I was focusing on before.” P42 designated distraction as instances “When I am not concentrating and not paying attention to what has to be done.” Likewise, P36 described distraction as “something that converts my attention from what I’m supposed be doing;” P43 noted distraction, as “Anything that takes away my attention” and P44 as “Certain things that take my attention away.” Finally, P41 defined distraction particularly within context of church, saying it is when “you can’t pay attention to the preacher.”

The remainder of the participants who defined distraction had similar content and concept, although the language they employed was slightly different. For instance, P2 described distraction as “something that sets on a tangent in my life goals and walk with God and family.” Similarly, P22 described distraction as “Anything that may cause a person to go down a different path than originally intended.” Two others explained distraction as a lack of concentration, with P40 describing it as “things that take away the concentration” and P49 as “Something that does not make you concentrate.”

## **Theme 2: Kinds and Causes of Distractions**

The second major theme was kinds and causes of distractions. Within this theme, participants described what distractions were most prevalent at church and what caused those distractions. There were five subthemes that emerged: other people, smartphones, outside concerns, boredom, and tiredness. Moreover, a final subtheme of outliers also emerged, in which participants said they were not distracted during church. The distribution of these responses can be seen in Table 1.



Table 1 Kinds and Causes of Distractions

	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Total Respondents ( $n = 50$ )
Other People	25	50%
Smart Phones	22	44%
Outside Concerns	12	24%
No Distractions	5	10%
Boredom	3	6%
Tiredness	2	4%

*Other People.* Twenty-five out of fifty participants (50%) described other people as a major distraction during church. Within this subtheme, participants generally explained that this subtheme could be understood as other people talking to each other or to them, movement by others, as well as the distraction of kids and babies. Two participants generally described the distraction as “other people” (P36) and “nonbelievers” (P48.) However, other respondents were more explicit. Ten of the twenty-five who cited other people as a major distraction specifically defined this as others speaking either to them or to others during the service. As P10 described the distraction, “The people talking, whispering, and laughing are all around.” P3 noted conversations were distracting because people were “talking when people should be listening.” P49, P26, and P4 concurred with P15 who said “People talking during the service” was most distracting. P23 explained it similarly, noting “Distraction to me is constant conversation around me.” P11 described the distraction as being more personal, “When someone is talking to me during the service.” Others noted the conversations could be on the phone; P32 said it was distracting “When people talking on the phone during the service.” For P17, it was “people’s

attitudes” that were distracting during church. Finally, P7 noted that it was both “Talking by others around me as well as the physical distraction of movement, with “People getting up and moving around.”

This concept of bodily distraction was echoed by five other participants as well. For example, P20 described the distraction as “people walking around” while P21 explained it as “people getting up and down.” Also, P33 described the distraction as “Sometimes when the people come late to the services,” while P3 noted it was “people leaving during the service,” and P40 said “movements during time that is supposed to be silence” is distracting. Finally, P45 specifically pinpointed the physical disruption to children, saying “all the movement from the kids” was distracting.

In addition to P45, eight others also noted that it was children – or babies – specifically who were distracting. While P45 noted it was kids running around, the other eight explicitly described the crying of the young ones. P3 and P12 expressly noted “crying babies” were the distraction, while P40, P13, P46, and P14 widened this definition to “kids that cry.” One participant, P16, was different insofar as she assigned the distraction to her baby specifically, noting that taking care of her baby distracted her from the service.

*Smart Phones.* The second subtheme was smart phones, which was cited by 22 of the 50 respondents (44%). Despite the fact that technology is expanding at rates of an unprecedented magnitude, less than half of the participants stated that a smartphone had ever distracted them at church. Indeed, only four of the 22 participants cited smart phones specifically; the other respondents, when explicitly asked about the distraction of smart phones, described them as a distraction at least once during church. P23 widened the category of distraction to “electronics” in general, while P29 narrowed the distraction of smart phones specifically to “social media.”

For P41, the distraction of phone is its primary function, noting the disturbance is “when the phones ring,” which is more a function of others’ phones than personal use. P8, on the other hand, expressly described the distraction of the smart phone’s capabilities, saying “Sometimes it [smart phone] does. I read emails when I’m at church sometimes.” It is unclear from the results, however, whether the distraction of smartphones is primarily a problem of personal use – such as P8 and P29 – or is an issue about others – such as P41.

*Outside Concerns.* The third subtheme was outside concerns, which involved the distractions of the outside world intruding into the spiritual realm. Twelve participants (24%) cited outside concerns as a cause of distraction, although the form of those concerns often varied. P23 noted that general issues were a distraction, saying “outside problems often affect my ability to focus in church,” while P27 agreed, citing “some of my own problems,” and P22 said “my own thoughts” could be a disturbance. Others discussed issues specifically related to home or work. P2 described distractions as “Most of the time bills, work or life problems like family relationships.” Also agreeing, P33 stated, “My distraction is sometimes my problem[s] at home.” P8 added that distractions were primarily “My chores that I have to do at home. I keep thinking of my problems. Anxious about everything else I have to do when I get home.”

Still others pointed to anything that takes them outside of themselves. For P35, this could be anxiety or something weighing on one’s mind: “Something that you are worried about and is on your mind or can be something outside of yourself to get your attention.” Also, P36 listed different outside distractions that impede on focus on church, including “Future plans, other commitments outside of church, random thoughts.” For P37 personal issues such as “bad habits” and “addictions” can act as a distraction, while P47 noted emotions can get in the way, saying, “Sometimes I am sad,” which leads to a lack of attention during church. Finally, P39 noted that

unwanted thoughts of desire can also be distracting: “When we focused on non-godly thing of the flesh during those moments.” For all of these participants, distractions are not a function of what is occurring in church, but what is happening outside of those walls.

*Boredom.* While only three participants cited “boredom,” as P1 described it, the concept of being uninterested in the service is still significant to note, and P15 attributed this lack of attentiveness and desire to the speaker, saying boredom occurs “If the orator is not interesting.” Similarly, P21 noted that boredom becomes a distraction when they are “not interested in the teaching.” Within this subtheme, distractions arise from the service itself, rather than internally.

*Tiredness.* Two respondents said that being tired was a distraction. Noting, P18 categorized the distraction as “Feeling tired, sleepiness,” and P29 had the same response, listing distractions as being “tired, sleepy.” This personal physical difficulty caused the participants to not be able to concentrate during the service. Unlike the previous subtheme, this one was internal, rather than external.

*No Distractions.* The final subtheme is comprised of five outliers, who argued that distractions were not a problem for them in church, and that their attention is consistently focused on the service. For example, P24 said they are “never distracted,” and that “Nothing is distracting.” The same was true for P25 who said “Nothing distract[s] me at church.” Further, P28 noted that their intentional focus on the service disallows for any form of distraction: “I don’t feel distracted at church; I am concentrated in the service.” The same was said by P38 who contended, “When I come to church I try to concentrate. Nothing is distracting.”

### Theme 3: Feelings about Distractions

The third major theme in this section was feelings about distractions, which explored how participants felt about being distracted. The distribution of responses is presented in Figure 1.

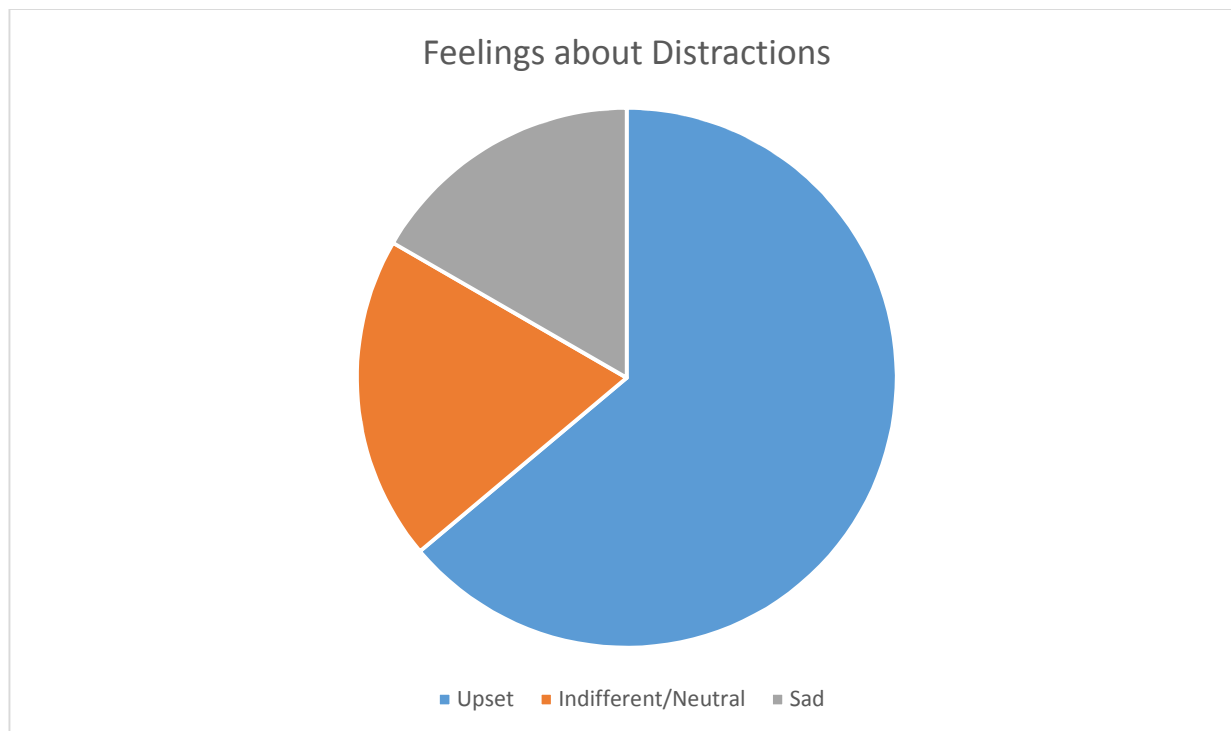


Figure 1 Feelings about Distractions

*Upset.* The majority of respondents who had feelings about distractions described themselves as upset; 23 respondents (46%) felt bad or distressed by the distractions themselves or by being distracted. Seventeen of the 23 respondents used very similar language in describing their feelings, saying they “don’t like it” (P13 and P49), and feel “bad” (P37, P18, P32, P33). Quantifying this, P43 stated this feeling as “very bad” and three others explained why they felt bad. Continuing, P40 noted, “I feel bad; I feel that church should be a place of calm and peace,” whereas P41 said, “I feel bad because of the distractions; you can lose the attention on the

service.” Again, P14 had similar reasoning, saying, “I feel bad, I lose track of the message.”

Others used different language with similar sentiment. For example, P10 said distractions make them feel “Upset, because we can’t listen to the teaching that is going on,” while P15 said, “Not good,” and P4 used the words “Not happy.” Also, P26 said being distracted “bothers me, I don’t like it,” but two separate participants used even stronger language. Likewise, P22 used the word “hate” noting, “I hate it because it feels like I’m wasting my time if I remain distracted,” and P8 feels “terrible. I wish I didn’t feel this way.”

Three other participants spoke to their feelings through physical distress. For P45, being distracted during services makes them “feel uneasy.” Two others spoke of a lack of comfort with distraction. Likewise, P11 said, “I don’t feel comfortable,” and P30 noted that distraction in church makes them “Sometimes uncomfortable.”

The four remaining participants who were upset by being distracted in church, the form of such dismay took different configurations. For example, P12 said distractions at church made them feel “Unfocused” and P9 said, “It makes me feel confused on the message.” Also, P2 felt self-reproach for being distracted, saying, “Being distracted to church makes me honestly guilty. Like I’m betraying my Lord and Savior.” Similarly, P39 was dismayed at the thought of distractions, saying, “We should have discipline in all the events.”

Each of these 22 respondents had varying levels and feelings of upset at being distracted during church. These feelings were most often self-directed, making the participants feel not only ashamed but also responsible for failing to keep their focus.

*Indifferent/Neutral.* The second subtheme within the theme of feelings about distraction was indifferent or neutral. The seven participants who cited this subtheme primarily had accepted the fact that distraction happens, and therefore did not feel bad about it. As P1 said, “It happens.”

P16 agreed, saying distraction is “not a big deal.” Also, P35 similarly said that distractions “will just happen or you will choose to ignore and focus on the service.” This idea was echoed by P7 who philosophically noted, “Things happen. Some are under our control.” Two others noted that because it happened frequently, they were not bothered by it. Similarly, P20 and P21 both said that they are “Used to it.” These respondents took a fatalistic approach to distractions, which allowed them to emotionally distance themselves from it.

*Sad.* The final subtheme within the theme of feelings about distraction is sad. Six respondents said that they felt sad about the distractions. For example, P23 described the sadness that came from not having attention on the service: “I feel like I’m not focus[ed], and I’m thinking other stuff then I just wasted a good blessing I should’ve been receiving.” Also, P27, on the other hand, worried that their sadness reflected the sadness of God: “Very sad and afraid [that] God will feel just like me.” As P5 explained, “It is not a good feeling to have. Being or feeling empty after during church service or not feeling God’s power through the worship or preaching is distracting.”

Interestingly, not all of these respondents directed such emotion inward, instead contending that their sadness emerged from the distractedness of others, rather than of themselves. As P17 said, “Sad, I wish people came to church to listen about God not to be on their phone.” Similarly, P44 contended, “Sometimes I feel very sad because I feel that some people don’t respect the Lords home.”

#### **Theme 4: Overcoming Distractions**

The final theme within this first section was overcoming distractions, which examined the ways in which congregants attempted to surmount the distractions they felt during services. The distribution of responses for this theme can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 How Congregants Overcome Distractions

	Respondents	Percentage of Total Respondents ( <i>n</i> =50)
Focus and/or Prayer	29	58%
Not Caring	4	8%
Stopping Others	3	6%

*Focus and/or prayer.* The majority of respondents – 29 people, or 58% - said that they were able to overcome distractions by either focusing, praying, or some combination thereof. Seven congregants were general in their responses, noting that they “pay attention” (P1) or “stay focused” (P6, P13, P23), or “always try to concentrate and pay attention all the time” (P41, P45). Three others gave some idea as to how to execute that kind of focus or attention. For P35, it is a matter of choice and discipline “It’s a choice on what you focus on. You are in control of your thoughts.” P26 is able to focus best and shut out distraction by “Clos[ing] my eyes,” while P12 cheekily relies on “coffee.”

Twelve other participants were more specific in explaining their concentration and focus, describing the target of such attention in an attempt to bar any distractions. For example, P7 and P46 both noted that they try to “concentrate on the service” in order to minimize distractions. Other participants focus on specific parts or aspects of the service. Two noted that concentrating



on the pastor is helpful. P10 noted that they “usually just try to focus on what the pastor is saying,” and P48 says to overcome distraction just “pay attention to Pastor Todd.”

Still others noted that the attention should be on not who is saying it, but what is being said. For P36 this means “focusing in on the message, analyzing what is being said,” and P14 concurred, noting that they can overcome distractions by “focusing completely on the message.” For P21, it was both the who and the what; as the congregant noted, they “Focus on the pastor and the Word.” Also, P15 also classified the need to “Concentrate on the word of God,” and P5 added to this concept, noting not only do they “concentrate on the words” but also on themselves through “internal worship, meaning singing in my heart the praises of the Lord.”

Three other participants described how they overcome distraction by focusing on God during the service. For P2, this is a personal reminder of the importance of God: “I focus on what He did for me and my mom and how if it wasn’t for Him my family would be homeless and fatherless.” Also, P27 noted that they work on “Concentrating on what it’s teaching to us about God and the worship.” Similarly, P22 says to overcome distraction, they need to “remind myself of the reason of why I go to church and focus on Christ.”

In a similar, albeit slightly different vein, eight participants described prayer as the antidote to distraction. For P19, the two are intertwined. This congregant noted overcoming distraction is about “Focusing in the Lord, and praying.” Others simply cited prayer (P17, P27, P38), or prayer and a “smile” (P9), and prayer and “reading the Bible” (P47). Two more congregants explained what they pray for. For P30 it is about “praying to God to help us to do a better comprehension for his kingdom.” Further, P8, on the other hand, prays for help surmounting internal distractions: “I pray, I asked God to help me overcome these feelings.” For all of these participants, concentrating on being present and in the moment – whether that is with

the pastor, with the Lord, with prayer, or with the service as a whole – is useful in surmounting the distractions that occur during church.

*Not caring about distractions.* The second subtheme was not caring about the distractions, or ignoring them, which was cited by four participants. For example, P20 said the key to overcoming distractions was “not minding it,” and P49 agreed, saying “do not pay attention” to the distractions. Also, P39 touted “trying to maintain the discipline” to ignore or not care about what was going on around them, and instead concentrate on the service. Similarly, P40 said they overcome distractions by “Ignoring it. Discipline. Closing my eyes.” With all of these responses, participants seem to be acknowledging the reality of distractions and working on not trying to change the situation, but instead deal with it as it is.

*Stopping others from being distracting.* The final subtheme of stopping others was cited by three people, and is grounded in external distractions. More specifically, congregants describing this subtheme saw other people as a primary distraction. For example, P11 said they confront the distraction head-on, in this case, talking to the fellow congregant: “Telling the person to please not distract me while the pastor is speaking.” Also, P26 is more passive, saying “If someone is talking, I come away.” Finally, P16 spoke specifically of her baby, noting that she could overcome the baby as a distraction by “Going outside to clean or feed him.”

## Section 2: Perceptions about Relationship with God

The second section that addresses the research question looks at congregants’ perceptions about their relationship with God. There were two major themes within this section: current relationship with God, and role of distraction in relationship with God.

### **Theme 1: Current Relationship with God**

Within this first theme, congregants were able to choose from a list of descriptors that illustrated their current relationship with God. Because most participants choose more than one set of descriptors, the total number is much greater than the sample size of congregants. The depiction of these descriptors is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Congregants' Perception of Their Relationship with/to God

	Total number of Respondents	Total Percentage of Respondents ( <i>n</i> =50)
Close and Loving	28	56%
Helpful and Peaceful	25	50%
Engaging and Exciting	15	30%
Open and Devoted	14	28%
Distant and Sad	4	8%
Confusing and Anxious	3	6%
Afraid and Worried	3	6%

The majority of congregants had a positive perception of their relationship with God. Fifty-six percent felt as if they had a close and loving relationship, 50% felt their relationship with God was helpful and peaceful, 30% labelled it as engaging and exciting, and 28% felt their relationship to and with God was open and devoted. In contrast, only 8% labelled their relationship as distant and sad, and 6% confusing and anxious or afraid and worried, respectively. This indicates that despite the distractions that occur in church, congregants still

overwhelmingly have a positive perception of their relationship with God. Moreover, all the respondents who chose negative descriptors also chose positive ones, suggesting a tension or conflict with how some of the congregants perceived their relationship with God. The next theme will explore how congregants, in their own words, feel that distraction affects their relationship with God.

### **Theme 2: Role of Distraction in Relationship with God**

The second and final theme within the second section of the research question was the role of distraction in relationship with God. This theme explores the way that congregants feel different types of distractions affect their relationship with God. The distribution of responses, by theme, can be seen in Figure 2.

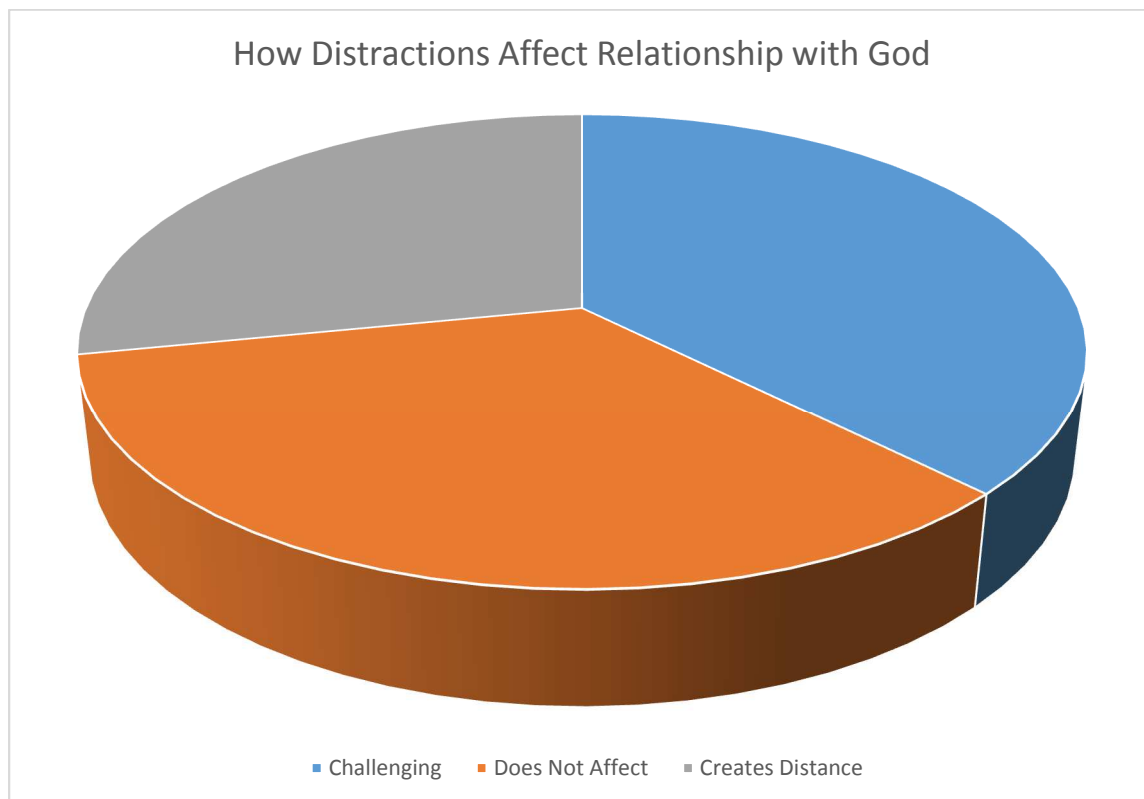


Figure 2 How Distractions Affect Relationship with God

*Challenging.* Twelve respondents described distractions as challenging to their relationship with God. These respondents, however, explained the challenge took different manifestations and forms. While P1 simply described the effect of distractions as “a challenge” and P12 labelled it “an obstacle” others went into more detail. Also, P21 described distractions a significant obstacle to their relationship with God, noting that “everyday life is a distraction.” For P39, distractions represented “feeling tied to the past,” which negatively impacted the present pursuit of God. Similarly, P46 noted that “I want to concentrate in God and not the distractions,” and that the latter made it difficult to do the former. Further, P8 also noted that distractions made it hard to pursue the kind of relationship that the participant wants: “I love God but I wish I can dedicate more time to him.” Also, P10 noted that even the distractions, which are hard to overcome, lead to more interaction with God. As the participant said, “I pray to God for distractions to stop as my role in the pursuit of God.”

Two other participants were more pessimistic about the challenges of distractions. For example, P13 said that, “It is at times greater than I can bear, but I manage at times,” indicating that distractions presented a significant obstacle, and P2 concurred, saying that distractions are “really just a setback in my path to his kingdom.” Also, P22 noted that not only are distractions a barrier to their relationship with God at church, but also at home, making the pursuit of a close relationship difficult: “Not a good one because it is not only in church that I get distracted but in my everyday life”

*Creates distance in relationship.* The second subtheme was a more specific indication of the challenges that congregants felt distractions proffered in their relationship with God. Nine participants described the way in which distraction created distance in either their pursuit or

actual relationship with God. As P14 explain, “It creates a distance between my personal relationship with him,” and P15 agreed that diversions effect one’s relationship to God because their purpose is “to distract you from God.”

Two of the participants described the role that distractions played in “keeping them” from their relationship. For example, P18 said distractions “keep me from God” while P29 similarly said that “distraction keeps me from reaching God.” Two more participants explicitly described the effect through the lens of “focus” or taking their attention away from God. Also, P11 said that distractions made them “feel unfocused” in their pursuit, and P35, on the other hand, described not only the importance of the relationship with God, but also how to ameliorate the distance created by distractions:

Staying close with God every day, to keep you on course. Reading his word, Spending time with him only way to stay focused. And when you fall off you came back quickly because you have that close relationship with him you don’t want to break.

Two other participants explicitly mentioned the distance created through a lack of communication. For P17, this lack of communication seemed to be coming from God: “Sometimes I feel that God is not listening to my prayers. I wish our church was more active.” P45, on the other hand, felt that the communication barrier was on both sides, saying, “I feel disconnected with my communication with the Lord.”

Finally, P36 described the way in which the distance formed in their relationship with God affects not just the relationship in isolation, but also its effect on the participant’s everyday life: “It takes away time from my relationship with God. It makes me reevaluate my priorities in terms of how my faith relates to my day to day.” For all of these participants, distractions

formed a wedge between themselves and their pursuit of a relationship with God, which ended up creating more distance.

*Not applicable.* However, much like the theme of distractions, there was also an outlier subtheme of participants who did not believe that distractions effected their relationship with God. Eleven congregants said that distractions did not get in their way. While three said the effect was “not applicable in my pursuit of God” (P28, P16, P6), others said the impact was “none” (P24, P4), “nothing” (P43), or “Not much of a big role” (P20). The remaining four participants made it clear that the lack of effect on their relationship with God was an intentional and conscious decision. As P25 put it, “I don’t allow anything to distract me.” P44 agreed that distractions do “not affect me with my relationship with him,” and P48 said that they are “not going to let it be a factor.” Similarly, P5 described their quest to deny distractions and concentrate on their relationship with the Lord: “I try not to give it a role because one gives a role to something they allow or except. I try not to let it affect my pursuit of God.”

### **Chapter Summary**

The findings of this study were divided into two main sections, in which the two facets of the research questions were addressed. The first section addressed how a person experiences distraction. Within this first section, there were four major themes: Defining Distraction, Distractions and Causes at Church, Feelings about Distractions, and Overcoming Distractions at Church. The first major theme was definition of distraction, wherein congregants explained how they understood the concept of distraction. Twenty-three of the fifty respondents defined distraction within the same framework – as an interruption that causes one to lose focus or divert attention from the task at hand.

The second major theme was kinds and causes of distractions. Within this theme, participants described what distractions were most prevalent at church and what caused those distractions. There were five subthemes that emerged: other people, smartphones, outside concerns, boredom, and tiredness. Moreover, a final subtheme of outliers also emerged, in which participants said they were not distracted during church. Twenty-five out of fifty participants (50%) described other people as a major distraction during church. Within this subtheme, participants generally explained that this subtheme could be understood as other people talking to each other or to them, movement by others, as well as the distraction of kids and babies. The second subtheme was smart phones, which was cited by 22 of the 50 respondents (44%). Despite the fact that technology is expanding at rates of an unprecedented magnitude, less than half of the participants stated that a smartphone had ever distracted them at church. The third subtheme was outside concerns, which involved the distractions of the outside world intruding into the spiritual realm. Twelve participants (24%) cited outside concerns as a cause of distraction, although the form of those concerns often varied. While only three participants cited “boredom,” as P1 described it, the concept of being uninterested in the service is still significant to note. Two respondents said that being tired was a distraction, and five outliers made up the final subtheme, arguing that distractions were not a problem for them in church, and that their attention is consistently focused on the service.

The third major theme in this section was feelings about distractions, which explored how participants felt about being distracted. The majority of respondents who had feelings about distractions described themselves as upset; 23 respondents (46%) felt bad or distressed by the distractions themselves or by being distracted. The second subtheme within the theme of feelings about distraction was indifferent or neutral. These respondents took a fatalistic approach to



distractions, which allowed them to emotionally distance themselves from it. The final subtheme within the theme of feelings about distraction is sad. Six respondents said that they felt sad about the distractions.

The final theme within this first section was overcoming distractions, which examined the ways in which congregants attempted to surmount the distractions they felt during services. The majority of respondents – 29 people, or 58% - said that they were able to overcome distractions by either focusing, praying, or some combination thereof. The second subtheme was not caring about the distractions, or ignoring them, which was cited by four participants. With all of these responses, participants seem to be acknowledging the reality of distractions and working on not trying to change the situation, but instead deal with it as it is. The final subtheme of stopping others was cited by three people, and is grounded in external distractions.

The second section that addressed the research question looked at congregants' perceptions about their relationship with God. There were two major themes within this section: current relationship with God, and role of distraction in relationship with God. Within this first theme, congregants were able to choose from a list of descriptors that illustrated their current relationship with God. The majority of congregants had a positive perception of their relationship with God. Fifty-six percent felt as if they had a close and loving relationship, 50% felt their relationship with God was helpful and peaceful, 30% labelled it as engaging and exciting, and 28% felt their relationship to and with God was open and devoted. In contrast, only 8% labelled their relationship as distant and sad, and 6% confusing and anxious or afraid and worried, respectively.

The second and final theme within the second section of the research question was the role of distraction in relationship with God. This theme explored the way that congregants feel

different types of distractions affect their relationship with God. Twelve respondents described distractions as challenging to their relationship with God. These respondents, however, explained the challenge took different manifestations and forms. The second subtheme was a more specific indication of the challenges that congregants felt distractions proffered in their relationship with God. Nine participants described the way in which distraction created distance in either their pursuit or actual relationship with God. However, much like the theme of distractions, there was also an outlier subtheme of participants who did not believe that distractions effected their relationship with God. Eleven congregants said that distractions did not get in their way.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

### **The Link Between Distraction and Spirituality**

Looking down from the lofty heights of skyscrapers of being and non-being, essence and existence, and consciousness and unconsciousness distraction seems rather mundane, trivial, and morose, but as a part of human experience, it sheds light on what people think and how they interpret their world. This research was designed to study the phenomena of distraction as to whether it relates to spirituality through the lived experiences of fifty people, and the findings suggest a correlation exists between distraction and spirituality.

As seen, what it means to be human is the focus of phenomenology, and from the very onset of this study, the theory and practice of such are applied to the examination of the phenomena of distraction. The goal of this thesis project has been to investigate the correlation between distraction and spirituality, and although the phenomena of distraction is readily accepted as part of the human condition, spirituality is called into question by some. Adherents to classical phenomenology would be dismissive of anything to do with God and the like, but spirituality is part of the human experience. To deny a person's belief system or world-view is to diminish who that person is in their being and their essence. Some fear that religion overshadows, if not overtakes, what it means to be human, so it is dismissed outright; however, this creates a far greater challenge because people are spiritual beings, and it is with this understanding that this study was grounded.

One of the themes that emerged regarding how a person feels about what they experienced sheds light on the fact that many feel upset or saddened due to distraction in their quest for God. This causality highlights the complexity of what it means to be human., and the participant's lived experience as reported reveals being, essence, and spirituality. What a person

pays attention to may afford them the opportunity to live in a flashy penthouse, and having focused attention may pay huge dividends of success, satisfaction, and security. But, distraction allows one to take in a breathtaking view of the world around, and it enables one to feel the rush of the senses and to feel alive whether faced with peril or thrill. The Sciences may build buildings that reach to the skies, but they bow in service to that which is greater, humanity, and it is in the humanness that the lived experience of the phenomena of distraction resides.

### **Contributions to Meaning, Significance, and Importance of Distraction**

#### **Section 1: The Breadth of Impact of Distraction**

What makes this Thesis Project exceptionally important to understand is due to the breadth to which people are affected by distraction, and the phenomena touch countless numbers of the participants regardless of gender, ethnicity, generation, and the like. Every person has experienced inattentiveness, diverted focus, and distraction, and there is no one who has not ever been distracted. Because of this phenomena affecting so many people, it makes this study extremely important, but this study is also critical because of the depth to which distraction effects the lived experience of an individual.

#### **Section 2: The Depth of Impact of Distraction**

Superficially, a person may experience a disruption in thinking for a moment, a pause in concentration stemming from an internal thought, or a disturbance of attention due to an object in the environment, but underneath, at bedrock, distraction affects everyone to the point of possible impaired judgment. This phenomenon affects the body, mind, and soul of an individual, and the consequences are as far-reaching as life-threatening, both temporal and eternal.

Various disciplines attach meaning to distraction based on their specific orientation, and it is related to its outcomes rather than its definition. For example, to a doctor of medicine, diversion may be defined in its usefulness to distract a patient while being poked with a hypodermic needle, and to a teacher, distraction could be defined by the student's inability to maintain sustained focus. The point being that meaning must be arrived at through examination of the lived experience by self-report whether through a case study, interview, or more. While each statement must be considered to be of singular in nature, typical themes or shared reality emerge to provide a conceptual framework that proves useful in understanding the shared experience of so many people and the degree to which they experienced the phenomena of distraction. These commonalities prove to be significant.

This Thesis Project found that most of the respondents claim to have experienced distraction, and this is significant in value. The specific meaning that is attached to distraction does not prove that it exists but only that its reality must be proven. While distraction is intangible, it can be seen by illustration, and more than half of the respondents make a connection between distraction and spirituality, and it is significant because it hinders a person's spiritual ability to connect to God. Because of this significance, it is important because it may positively or negatively influence a person's life choices and eternal destiny.

Meaning, significance, and importance of the phenomena of distraction must be considered as it affects people from all walks of life, and these must be considered to clarify potential ramifications to the spiritual lives of people. It is not just the breadth and depth that make this important; it also the scope.

### Section 3: The Scope of Distraction

What makes this Thesis Project exceptionally important is the contribution that it makes to research in the fields of phenomenology and practical theology. As seen earlier, not all experience can be investigated through scientific methodology, and the phenomena of distraction cannot be quantified or defined by a mathematical formula. Still, Phenomenology is foundational to all research because it has its place in studying the lived experience of an individual, and this Thesis Project extends Phenomenology in its theory and practice by allowing for the spiritual to be part of understanding the wholeness of the lived experience.

Practical Theology seeks to understand orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and this Thesis Project found that out of the fifty participants just about all discussed their spiritual life. Though the sample size could have been greater, it is a fair representation of what people experience regarding this phenomenon. Distraction affects the spiritual lives of people, and pastors need to understand the connection between belief and practice. Belief informs practice, and practice informs belief. What is necessary to understand is that distraction impacts the lives of parishioners in their action and reaction to the phenomena. For example, if the environmental revealed anything during this inquiry, then it shows how an object can become an extension of Self. The parishioner sitting in church with a Smartphone may not see it as being a distraction, but rather, it may reveal identity, dependency, and relationship issues. At church, distraction comes from a myriad of possibilities, and pastors, as under-shepherds, should attempt to remove as many distractions as possible.

The findings of this Thesis Project furthered phenomenology and practical theology by examining the meaning, significance, and importance of the phenomena of distraction in the lived experience of an individual. Distraction is anything but trivial or mundane, and it deserves

priority and emphasis as it is relevant to one's life and world. Throughout history, attention (i.e., the cousin of distraction) stands in the foreground with distraction lurking in the shadows.

#### Section 4: Continuing the Discussion of Distraction

What makes this Thesis Project exceptionally important is that the phenomena of distraction do exist, and it can be traced throughout history. From the time of Aristotle to the present, the effects of distraction have been noted even if the origins of the phenomena cannot be seen. Aristotle may not have wanted to give much attention to the framework surrounding distraction, but he at least noted its existence. Advancing in time, philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre address the notion of distraction but failed to make the connection to the spiritual. This study attempts to speak to this void. What makes this Thesis Project exceptionally important is in its regard for the past, identifies the present, and shapes the future.

#### **Synopsis of Research**

Chapter One provided a rationale and the necessity for studying the phenomena of distraction, and it explained with broad strokes the biblical and literary research. The phenomena of distraction are elusive because the moment it becomes the object of attention it ceases to be a distraction, and it poses another challenge in that it must be examined through self-report. Distraction for one person may not be the same for another, and the degree to which the distraction affects the thoughts and feelings of the subject can only best be described by the individual. Phenomenology was employed to focus on the lived experience of individuals, and it framed the investigation into the spiritual lives of the person. Scripture presented what and how an individual is to give attention, and it warns of the consequences of being distracted. The

literary research revealed that the problem of distraction does, in fact, exist, and its identification and ramification are seen in a wide array of various areas of study. These revelations are expounded in the second chapter of the Thesis Project.

Chapter Two provided an overview of the literary research for the Thesis Project, and it finds the problem of the phenomena of distraction to be in its definition, the lack of a cohesive theory built over time, the implications and consequences of being distracted, and the limited study of its effect in the spiritual lives of people. Six areas of thought created a boundary for the investigation, and they were philosophical, theological, psychological, biological, environmental, and practical. Philosophical undercurrents revealed that much has been considered about attention but not so much about distraction, and phenomenology supports all philosophical thought and inquiry. Distraction is not an object that can be quantified, and it is only understood through the subject's experience and revelation. Inquiry into the theological revealed that spiritual forces might impose distraction upon the subjective experience of an individual. Investigation into the mind (i.e., Gestalt Psychology) discovered that the lived experience of the individual must be studied in the present moment, and understanding distraction in the past and potential future only matter in relation to the here-and-now. The brain, its anatomy and function, is shaped by the experiences of the subject, and this includes the shaping and development with the interaction of the phenomena of distraction. The world beyond Self (i.e., environmental) reveals that objects apart from the subject may act in a manner to distract the attention of the subject. The distraction must be of sufficient magnitude to overcome the energy being expended by the subject in its given attention, and the distraction now becomes the focal point of attention. Finally, the practical investigation revealed that distraction has real-world, down-to-earth consequences, and distraction is useful, valid, distinctive, economic, and verifiable. As such, the



nature, essence, and consequence of the phenomena of distraction warrants investigation in its effect upon the spiritual lives of people.

Chapter Three laid out the parameters and findings of testing upon fifty subjects of Faith Community Church, and it revealed a common, shared, lived experience of distraction that effected the spiritual lives of the individuals. This study proves a correlation exists between an object (i.e., smartphone), the subjective experience of distraction by individuals, and a resulting impact on the perception of one's spiritual journey.

Chapter Four concluded the Thesis Project revealing the evidential matter, facts, and a theory of distraction, and it finished with considerations for ministry. This limited study of the phenomena of distraction revealed the importance for further study of the value, norms, and mores of individuals as it relates to distraction and spirituality, and it concluded that distraction holds profound implications and consequences for one's spiritual journey.

### **Theory of Distraction**

This Thesis Project is broadly in keeping with other qualitative researchers in that it seeks to understand the phenomena of distraction not as a means of predicting future behavior but as understanding the human experience. By way of explanation, the study of the phenomena of distraction must be observed in a living person (i.e., in vivo as opposed to a priori), and it is through coding, categorization, and conceptualization that distraction is observed, theorized, and understood. The findings of this Thesis Project are broadly in keeping with individuals like Husserl who believe that richness of what it means to be human needs to be explored, and in so doing, distraction is seen not as taking away from attention but as related to it. Distraction is part of the lived, human experience, and deserves full investigation.

This phenomenological study agrees with those who postulate that the phenomena of distraction is difficult to locate, define, and analyze, but it does put forward the idea that understanding can be arrived at through a limited set of facts and concluding a general acceptance of its cause. The findings suggest possibly that most people have a notion or an idea concerning distraction, but very few individuals seem to have a clear definition or understanding of what is distraction. A person may be able to explain what is a cause-and-effect relationship in their experience with the phenomena, but no one can point to an object and say with any degree of certainty that this is distraction. What makes this phenomena, and all phenomena, difficult to define is that it requires moving from the visible to the invisible, and herein lies the problem. Understanding distraction requires induction. Plausibly, many would have a problem with such a leap, but the phenomena of distraction seem to defy any scientific methodology or mathematical computation. It is part of the human experience, and it is hard to define. Acceptance of this leads to the next conclusion regarding the relationship between distraction and attention.

This Thesis Project contends that distraction is possibly more than diverted attention, and that the power of distraction is so forceful that it has the ability to realign focus. The findings of this project seem to indicate that most individuals were to some degree distracted at church for a myriad of reasons which included people, technology, and more. Many persons sustain their focus on the pastor (i.e., speaking, singing, etc.) only to have it averted by something or someone, and this diversion produces a negative affect for the individual. The widely held view that attention is dominate underestimates the power of the phenomena. So, not only is distraction a force to be reckoned with, but it is also singularly unique.

Broadly speaking, people view themselves as individualistic, although also part of a community. This Thesis Project concludes that the impact and influence of the phenomena of

distraction possibly supports the notion of individualism. No two individuals experience the same thing in the same way, and this is due to biology, circumstances, heritage, upbringing, and more. What makes something distracting to one person may be completely different to another. The findings support this fact by revealing how one might experience a baby crying at church. For one, there is a distraction, but to another, it does not bother that person in the least.

Another conclusion supported by the data may include that the phenomena of distraction is deterministic. In this theory regarding distraction, how a person experiences distraction might be determined by an external force, and from a theological perspective, distraction may be placed there by God. How the body is created to take in the existing environment is determined by God, and the times, seasons, and places affecting a person is determined by God. So, in this sense, the individual is given a unique and designed experience as it relates to distraction. So many may believe that distraction happens at random, but the findings seem to suggest otherwise. The phenomena may be placed in such a way by God so as to gain a person's attention, and again, this comes with such force that the person reacts by diverting their attention. For example, as seen in the findings, a congregant experiences the phenomena and realigns their focus attention through closing their eyes or by praying to God. This conclusion then leads to another finding of cause-and-effect.

This Thesis Project concludes that there is a possibility of causality to distraction, and how a person experiences distraction is the cyclical nature of cause-and-effect. It is broadly understood that a distraction (i.e., cause) may have an outcome (i.e., effect), and the outcome is dependent upon the cause. The findings reveal that a person might experience a distraction, and the resulting outcome evokes a strong emotion felt by the person. This feeling is dependent upon what caused it in the first place. What makes this exciting to understand is the fact that the

possibility exists of recognition and identification of phenomena of distraction may be labeled and learned.

In constructing a theory of distraction, what can be recognized can be identified, and what can be identified can be labelled which means that distraction can be learned. Science seeks to learn about the world in and beyond the Self. Logic, reasoning, meaning, and more are useful to that end, and so is phenomenology. This Thesis Project concludes that it is possible to learn, and specifically, humanity can learn what it means to be human by studying the lived experience of the individual. Through Self revelation, the phenomena of distraction can be recognized as suggested by the findings, and by identifying a distraction, it can then be labelled as such. This broadly agrees with the work of Kant in the formation of labelling though this project does not seek to discuss at any length the categories of labelling. The implication is that research can be done in such a way that learning can take place, and that the phenomena of distraction can be known.

Another conclusion of this Thesis Project is that distraction may be seen as an isolated incident, but it can be viewed as a whole. Distraction is more than just a sum of occurrences. The findings speak to individuals recalling a certain time, place, or situation in which they felt distracted, and many were able to identify the what they felt about distraction and how they felt about being distracted. Taken as a whole, the phenomena are a lived, shared experience of people even though the findings suggest that not all people may see themselves as being distracted.

The final conclusion of this Thesis Project suggests that there is a possible correlation between distraction and spirituality, and for most people, the phenomena are seen as a negative when it comes to their pursuit of God. The findings suggest that for most individuals they view their relationship in a positive light, but they felt distant and challenged in their relationship to

God due to the phenomena of distraction. While some researchers and philosophers would be skeptical of bringing God and spirituality into the picture in the first place, the findings suggest possibly that people can understand their humanness to include the spiritual.

### **Implications of Applied Research**

A question arises regarding context in that it is possible that individuals might respond differently had the questionnaire been administered at a different location other than a church. The context could possibly unduly influence the thoughts and feelings expressed by the individual, and key relationships within that context may place undue pressure regardless of how a researcher may try to distance him or herself. Yet, maybe the context of another setting might influence the results just as easily.

Another implication is that the individuals selected to participate already have a heightened sensitivity toward distraction. What is singularly repeated from the pulpit are messages extolling the virtues of being in relationship to God and one another. In general, most have heard statements alluding that we are all God's children. Whether this is true or not is beyond the scope of this project, but most have heard this repeated again and again. Being in a relationship requires in some measure a focus of attention. Frequency of attendance implies a desire on the part of the individual to be engaged in the relationship. Therefore, it is plausible to consider that by virtue of the fact they are present at church in the first place they are already predisposed towards focused attention on God and any distraction would be of a heightened concern.

Finally, another implication has to do with the design and implementation of the qualitative analysis. The methodology of the Thesis Project followed a common practice of research design, and the result highlighted a shared experience of distraction. The steps involved

in this Thesis Project moved from a question to general reading to literary research to qualitative analysis, and from the data, themes and categories were raised from the experiment. However, had the design been changed, then the results might have been quite different. For example, instead of placing the experiment after the literary research, place the experiment before conducting the literary research. In other words, let the facts speak for themselves without a possible influence arising from the reading. The shaping of the questions, the underlying thought and reason for the questions, and the influence of other researchers expressed ideas are considerations that might need to be addressed after the experiment is conducted. Understandably, the process of moving from literary research to experiment greatly reduces the chance of needless and haphazard experimentation, but it might also limit the freedom to experiment.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This Thesis Project only begins to scratch the surface of the phenomena of distraction, but it does so in a meaningful way by allowing for the spiritual to be considered as a part of the lived experience of a person. There is a need for further study regarding value, duration, and longevity.

A possible course of study that might prove useful is to attach to various objects of distraction a numeric code according to the value that each person might give importance, and then, place the value according to rank. This might prove useful if limited to a given context such as ministry.

Another possible need might be to determine the frequency and duration of a particular distraction. To a parishioner, a child crying in the worship service might be upsetting, but a child

crying throughout the entire service might be unbearable for some. This might inform an appropriate measure to rectify the problem.

Another need for study is a thorough treatment of distraction traced philosophically over time. The reason why this might prove beneficial is that theory may change over time, and the same might be said regarding the treatment of distraction over time.

### **Practical Application for Ministry**

Distraction is a part of the lived experience of a pastor and congregant, and the findings of this Thesis Project confirm the breadth, depth, and scope to which people experience the phenomena of distraction. Practical application to ministry follows two categories: pastoral leadership and congregant.

Clergy leadership does well to understand the phenomena of distraction for themselves and for the people they lead, and out of an entire body of people, no one will care more possibly than they regarding this issue. Lack of attention towards God and people can prove dire in the ministry. The hardest person to lead in ministry is Self. A pastor must give thought to how distraction might be preventing him or her from hearing the voice of God, and a pastor desires most to hear from Him as to the direction and oversight of their life and church. This Ministry Project aids in identifying possible sources of distraction whether stemming from internal or external sources. For example, if a pastor is maybe wittingly addicted to the cellphone, then dealing with the object and its use may be of importance to Self. Further, a pastor leads by example to the flock entrusted to his or her care, and it is they who consider people being distracted. It is essential to understand that precipitating events may influence how a parishioner enters into the worship service. He or she, according to the findings, may be distracted from something that happened at home before coming to church. Their presenting distraction may

have little or nothing to do with the church or pastor at all. Sometimes a pastor may internalize the other person's pain and sadness thinking that it is something they said or did to cause such a problem, and this may be the farthest from the truth. The phenomena of distraction are a part of the lived experience of a pastor, and it is part of the lived experience of those they lead.

In general, it might be helpful to address the issue of distraction from the pulpit, and it might be helpful to address a problem rather forthright. Some might choose to leave things well enough alone hoping that any problem will dissipate over time. For example, ringtones sounding at inappropriate times, as the findings reflect, may cause distraction. The attention is diverted, and the problem never seems to be discussed or rectified. By giving voice to an identified problem, the pastor can then encourage reform. By removing a potential distraction, the pastor may be helping the congregant not to be distracted in the first place.

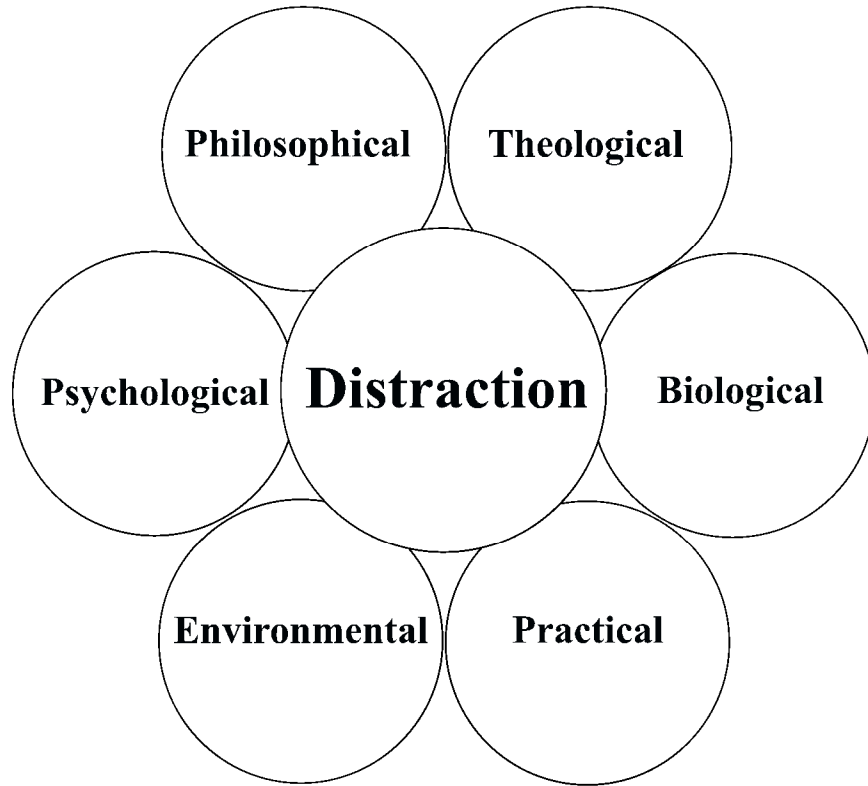
### **Final Thought**

God gives an individual the ability to cope with distraction, and the study of the lived experience of an individual brings a richness to understanding both God and His creation. It is nothing short of amazing how the mind works, and whether it is through biology, psychology, neuroscience, and more, the human brain and its function pose an endless supply of wonder and inquiry. The phenomena of distraction are every bit as astounding as laughter, joy, excitement, and hope, and even though each of these marvels may not be able to be studied through scientific methodology or mathematics, discovering the world within and beyond ourselves is waiting. The only question is if we will pay attention or be distracted.



**Appendix A**

Various Fields of Study Interacting with Distraction



## Appendix B

### Questionnaire

What is distraction to you?

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What causes you to be distracted at church?

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How do you feel about being distracted at church?

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How do you overcome distraction while at church?

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What role does distraction have in your pursuit of God?

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What do you feel your relationship to be like with God right now? (circle all that apply)

Close and loving	Helpful and peaceful	Painful and angry
Confusing and anxious	Distant and sad	Open and devoted
Afraid and worried	Engaging and excited	Other: _____

Has a smartphone distracted your attention at church? Yes    No

What do you feel about being distracted by a smartphone at church? (Circle all that apply.)

Indifferent	Hopeful	Curious
Relief	Angry	Surprised
Neutral	Uneasy	Important
Nervous	Happy	Indifferent
Connected	Interested	Other: _____

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