

The Facebook Detox Challenge

Hello, my name is Isaac, and I am a Facebook addict.

I don't say this to make light of people who struggling with drug or alcohol addiction. I don't say it because I think it is a cool catch-phrase. I say this as a true realization that I have a real problem: my compulsive need to check Facebook is interfering with my goals in life and is robbing me of happiness.

Why am I picking on Facebook, and not, say Twitter or Instagram or the Web in general? Because, no other online service has become such a routine part of my day. In this increasingly "connected" world, I find I can no longer maintain a healthy balance between the time I spend on and off of Facebook. While I occasionally engage in other social media, like Twitter, Facebook is the only social tool that captures my attention and distracts me from life on an increasing basis.

I recently went through the oddly painful process of whittling down my Facebook friends list, in order to cut back on the negativity I was seeing in my news feed. I "unfriended" anyone with whom I had not had a *real* connection in at least the past year. If you remain on my friends list, it is because we have had at least one Facebook interaction, message, email, phone call, or face-to-face conversation in the last year.

This was a last ditch effort to try to reclaim a balance in my Facebook usage, but, alas, it hasn't solved the underlying problem – **me**.

I realize many people can check their Facebook once a week, or even less frequently, and be fine with it. I cannot. For

whatever reason, it has become an albatross to me.

I do still see some tremendous value in the platform, particularly as a pastor, who wants to remain connected with the people in my church and community, as well as colleagues and friends from other places. It is also a useful tool for advertising happenings at my church ([Union United Methodist](#)).

For these reasons, I don't want to quit the service entirely. But my unmetered access is mitigating these positive attributes for me, personally. So, I am proposing another solution – a Facebook detox, if you will. Others may have come up with something similar. I don't know, because I honestly didn't look. So, here's my plan.

The Challenge – Phase 1

The biggest tradeoff I have made in the name of social media is spending less time reading *real* books. I am still an avid reader, and am generally working my way through several books at a time. For example, I am currently reading a biography of John Wesley, the science fiction novel [Dune](#), by Frank Herbert, the fantasy novel [The Eye of the World](#), by Robert Jordan, and just finished [Manage Your Day-to-Day](#), by the fine folks at 99U.

The problem is that it now takes me significantly longer to read through books than it used to, because I am more often wasting time on Facebook or reading articles I find linked there. And even while I am actively reading real books, I often feel the urge to put them down and take a quick peak at my News Feed.

To top it off, I've noticed that it has become increasingly difficult for me to concentrate on the "meatier" books that I believe will enrich my life, such as good theology, research books for my PhD thesis, and classic literature. Perhaps I

have gotten too used to social media soundbites, or maybe it is a combination of that plus the over-sensational and under-delivering drivel that often masquerades as news or long form articles. Whatever the cause, the more time I spend reading online material, the harder it becomes for me to engage with material of a higher quality that adds value to my day.

So, **Part 1** of the Facebook Detox Challenge will be to correct the impact it has had on the written materials I consume (Look for Part 2 in a future post). Here's how it will work.

I propose to remain logged out of Facebook until such time as I have read 5 books, one from each of the following categories:

1. **Devotional Works** – a book, whether ancient or modern, which reflects deeply on the Christian life and/or scripture.
2. **Professional Development** – In my case, as a pastor, this means a book on preaching, teaching, Biblical exegesis, leadership, etc.
3. **Topical Research** – in my case, this will need to be focused on my PhD research, but for others who want to take up the challenge, it could be any topic you find interesting and about which you would like to learn more (e.g., history, physics, astronomy, medicine, etc.)
4. **Literature** – classic literature or poetry.
5. **Fiction** – because God has given us wonderful imaginations, and we all need to dream.

Upon finishing a book from each category, I will allow myself to resume logging in as a normal user and see if my relationship with Facebook has changed. If not, I will repeat the process.

****Exceptions:****Because I do use Facebook for my work, I need to make some exceptions to the no-log-in rule. If you are in a similar situation, you might adjust this list to suit your

particular scenario.

a) During my detox period, I will occasionally post articles or other status updates from a third-party app (I prefer [Buffer](#)), because I want my people to see it.

b) I will still log in weekly to post worship or event related information to my organization's Facebook wall, because I don't have someone who can do that for me at this time.

c) I will respond to Facebook Messenger messages, because that is the primary means some people use to reach me. However, for this last one, I will use the app, so that I don't have to log into Facebook proper.

You may have already gained mastery over your social media usage. But if, like me, you are struggling to maintain balance in your use of Facebook (or some other platform), I want to encourage you to try a detox for yourself.

I'm beginning mine today.