

Choose 'Bloomscrolling' for Better Health, Say Researchers

*The Wired Word for the Week of
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In the News

Award-winning author Pamela Hill Nettleton recently wrote an article posing the question, "Why do we voluntarily expose ourselves to violent stories on screen?" For millennia, humans have told ghost stories around campfires, visited haunted houses on Halloween, watched horror movies, and read scary fairy tales about witches and ogres in dark woods to little children at bedtime that gave them nightmares.

Nettleton wonders why are we so willing to subject ourselves to so many scenes of torture, seemingly so fascinated and entertained by violence to the point of psychological addiction. "We venerate hurting and killing one another, and we eat popcorn while we view it. We scare ourselves into believing that the world really is terrifying, that danger lurks around every corner, and that we should trust almost no one," she says. When we consume so much violence, we can minimize and become numb to it, eventually normalizing it as "just the way things are."

George Gerbner, early researcher into media violence, discovered that the more violent entertainment people consume, the more they believe that the world is a scary place. He testified before Congress in 1981 that "fearful people are more dependent, more easily manipulated and controlled, more susceptible" -- leading them to be more open to oppressive governmental policies that promised security and protection to ease their fear.

Gary Slutkin, a physician and former director of interventions for the [World Health Organization](#), writes that violence "is an acquired illness. And contagious. ... In other words, we catch violence by primarily seeing it. ... there are now over one hundred studies showing that exposure to violence makes people more likely to be violent."

Nettleton asserts that so many violent stories are "a distortion of who we are and certainly a corruption of who we are called to be. We have other stories to tell one another -- about understanding and healing, learning from mistakes, pursuing restorative justice, growing and deepening in our own humanity. ... we could choose to venerate complex, redemptive, intriguing, realistic, heartbreaking, uplifting stories in which no one is slaughtered, raped, or shot."

Niloufar Nekou, marriage and family therapist and chief clinical officer at Care Predictor, suggests that rather than mindlessly doomscrolling

through whatever anxiety-heightening content shows up on your feed, we might practice "bloomscrolling," which is "the conscious act of seeking out uplifting, beautiful, or inspiring content to protect your peace, lift your mood, and cultivate digital wellness."

Becoming the curator of what you place in the museum of your mind's eye restores your sense of agency as you intentionally select inspiring art, music and dance clips, heartwarming stories of human acts of kindness, beautiful nature or funny animal videos, educational material and other content that brings you feelings of joy, peace and thankfulness.

Sanam Hafeez, PsyD, neuropsychologist and director of Comprehend the Mind, says bloomscrolling "does not mean pretending that bad things are not happening or completely avoiding the news. It is more about creating a healthier balance so that everything you see online is not making you feel anxious, angry, or overwhelmed."

Bloomscrolling allows you to indulge your natural curiosity about the world, which helps build empathy and reminds you that positive things are still happening in the world alongside the negative, Hafeez adds.

Emma Dunwoody, a behavioral expert and business/life coach, suggests creating device-free zones at bedtime and during meals. "The goal is to make your phone work for

you, not against you, [and] create space for intentionality."

Setting a time limit for on-screen time or putting your device aside once you've achieved the morale or mood boost you need can help, Hafeez said. Then find ways to reconnect with humans in the real world, which is the only "real cure for constant digital overload," according to Nekou.

Quynh Mai, CEO of [Qulture](#) and a leading expert on Gen Z cultural trends, commented that "Every generation, especially Gen Z, is growing nostalgic for a time when life seemed a lot simpler, when people were able to connect with each other, nature, or even spend time on their own, lost in their thoughts." Some people are increasingly seeking ways to unplug from 24/7 digital stimulation in favor of offline experiences as a way to lower stress and improve mental and physical health.

Some companies now offer digital detox retreats in which guests surrender their devices and participate in screen-free experiences in dining, nature, travel to new environments, contemplative activities, or spa treatments.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Violent Media Distorts Our Perception of God's Good World. U.S. Catholic](#)

[The Antidote to Doomscrolling Is 'Bloomscrolling' -- and It Takes Just](#)

Five Minutes a Day. Real Simple

The Silent Way Your Phone is Sabotaging Your Mind -- and How to Fight Back. Yahoo

The End of Violence: Eliminating the World's Most Dangerous Epidemic. Gary Slutkin, M.D.

Applying the News Story

Use this lesson to discuss ways our faith can help us make wise decisions regarding the use of our devices to better contribute to personal health and spiritual vitality.

The Big Questions

- 1. What percentage of your online, TV or movie consumption would you say contains violent content? Has the amount of violent content you see increased or decreased over time? Why do you watch it?**
- 2. How does seeing violent content repeatedly impact you or people you know?**
- 3. What might happen if people exclusively doomscroll? What if they only bloomscroll?**
- 4. What guardrails can people establish to protect their minds and spirits from the effects of overconsumption of violent content?**
- 5. How should we balance our need for Sabbath rest of mind and body with the need to see and respond to hurting people around us and in the larger world?**

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

2 Kings 6:15-17

When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" He replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." Then Elisha prayed, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (For context, read [2 Kings 6:8-23.](#))

The Arameans repeatedly raided towns in the northern kingdom of Israel. The prophet Elisha was able to inform the Israelites before any attacks, thus thwarting the warring parties, angering the king of Aram, who sent his army with horses and chariots by night to capture Elisha. In the morning, Elisha's attendant saw Aram's army and panicked. But Elisha asked God to open his aide's eyes, so that he might see the invisible allies who were already standing with them.

Then God struck the Aramean warriors with blindness, allowing Elisha to trick them into entering Samaria where they were at the mercy of the Israelites. The Arameans probably expected that they would all be killed, but instead, Elisha fed them and sent them home, after which the Arameans stopped their violent raids

on Israel.

Questions: How might the perspective of Elisha's attendant been shaped by watching repeated violent attacks against Israel? What did his constant "doomscrolling" prevent him from seeing? Why did he need a new vision to give him hope and courage?

Esther 4:5, 9

Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. ... Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. (For context, read [Esther 4:1-14](#).)

When Haman secured the authority to slaughter all the Jews in Persia, Queen Esther was unaware of the plot, until her relative, Mordecai, brought it to her attention. You could say that she might have lived happily in a bubble, doing whatever passed for doomscrolling then, without a care in the world, while her people were at mortal risk. But she placed their survival ahead of her desire for her own safety.

Questions: When might doomscrolling serve as an attempt at escapism, to avoid the exhausting responsibility of caring for others when doing so might cost us something? Why didn't Esther ignore Mordecai's appearance in sackcloth at the king's gate? What should we do when we learn of people who are in a kind of emotional sackcloth in

our own community, nation and world?

Luke 2:28-32

Simeon took [the child] in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (For context, read [Luke 2:22-35](#).)

Simeon, a devout old man, had waited decades for God to send his promised Messiah. In the meantime, he had no doubt seen much crime, injustice, poverty, corruption, hunger, sickness, cruelty at the hands of Roman oppressors and more, to dismay and discourage him. But he kept "looking forward to the consolation of Israel," which the Holy Spirit had assured he would see before he died (vv. 25-26). When Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the temple for the purification ritual, Simeon recognized the infant as the one for whom he had been waiting.

Yet while Simeon praised God and blessed the Holy Family, he also foretold that many would oppose the Christ child and that a sword would pierce Mary's soul.

Questions: How can Simeon's example help us when we witness horrific atrocities, natural and human-caused disasters, and inexplicable tragedies multiple times

a day? How can our faith help us face life's challenges realistically, while maintaining trust in God and hope in God's faithfulness?

Luke 10:30-34

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ..." (For context, read [Luke 10:25-37](#).)

Often when we hear this parable, we are quick to find fault with the priest and the Levite who didn't stop to help the wounded man. But consider the possibility that they were traveling a notoriously dangerous road, where bandits set up a decoy to trick people into stopping to help. Then the robbers would leap out of their hiding places and attack the would-be helpers. Maybe the priest and the Levite had been crime victims themselves, or knew people who had been victimized this way. Nonetheless, it's not surprising that we might have expected the priest and the Levite to be the first to help

the wounded man, given their theological training and calling.

The priest, the Levite and the Samaritan all saw the beaten man, but they interpreted what they saw differently. The first two saw danger, or trickery, or yet another intractable social problem someone should do something about. The last man saw a neighbor in need, whether he knew him or not, and he was moved with compassion. The first two moved away, but the Samaritan moved toward the man in need, and did what he could to help.

Questions: What keeps us from seeing people in need in our community? What prevents us from moving toward them to help? What resources do we have that could be used to care for them? What are we willing to risk and spend in such a mission?

For Further Discussion

- 1. Think about this, from TWW Team Member Frank Ramirez: "Regarding bloom- and doom- scrolling, I think it's serendipitous that in the Bible, the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes are side by side. They're both true, but Ecclesiastes can be pretty grim and pessimistic while the Song of Songs dramatizes that time of our lives when the most beautiful and foolish times of our lives hold sway."*
- 2. Discuss this, from TWW Team Member Mark Rouleau: "It's what I refer to as the 'Jerry Springer [of reality TV] Effect' of normalizing all kinds of aberrant behavior. I was just*

listening to a Perry Stone teaching this morning, about Abraham negotiating with God over Lot in anticipation of God's judgment on Sodom where Lot lived ([Genesis 18:22-33](#)). Stone surmised that Abraham stopped at 10 righteous people because Lot, his wife, their daughters plus their husbands and house staff would add up to 10, and Abraham did not count on the sons-in-law and the staff having become so accustomed to living in Sodom that they would be unwilling to leave."

3. "I am reminded of the frog in a pot, beginning in cool water and then as the temperature increases to boiling, it realizes too late that it is in trouble," observed TWW Team Member Mary Sells. "Is exposure to violence also a changing baseline when we become inured to it?" Sells asked. "Children's books and video games are often violent, stories of good versus evil or merely violence for entertainment's sake. TV shows and movies entertain us with epic battles and crime waves. Constant exposure in media to man's inhumanity to man might initially horrify us, yet over time we say 'oh, sad, another school shooting' or 'another bomb dropped in Ukraine or Russia or the Middle East,' and scroll on to the next story, forgetting what we just witnessed moments before. Have we lost perspective on violence by experiencing or observing so much of it?"

4. The disciples who were walking

from Jerusalem to Emmaus after the death of Christ were consumed by grief, confusion and uncertainty. When the risen Lord joined them on the road, they didn't recognize him ([Luke 24:13-35](#)). President Jimmy Carter wrote that "Jesus appears to us in the most mundane ways -- when we're walking down a road, when we're with a friend, when we see somebody in need, when we hear about an opportunity to show kindness, when we have a special problem. Jesus appears to us in ordinary things. But to recognize his presence, we have to be receptive, alert, and eager to welcome him into the occasion."

When have you been so overwhelmed by bad news, negative posts or depressing content of media or entertainment that you missed seeing beauty or experiencing joy that was right in front of you?

Responding to the News

Bonus Scriptures you might want to explore on your own this week, with these questions in mind:

*[Matthew 9:36](#); [Hebrews 12:1-3](#);
[Matthew 25:31-46](#); [2 Corinthians 3:18](#);
[Philippians 4:8](#)*

Whom should we watch, on what should we focus, and what can we learn from what we see? And how should we respond to that vision?