

**ARTICLE**

# **Why doomsurfing won't satisfy our longing for peace**

More online information can't comfort our souls

**BY JASON THACKER**

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If we are honest with ourselves, the last few weeks (and likely many more to come) have been extremely difficult. Some of us have become sick or known loved ones who contracted COVID-19. Others have lost their jobs and livelihoods due to stay-at-home orders put in place to slow the spread of the virus. While many others have seen little day-to-day impact of the virus spread

in their communities, they are still lost in the news and updates from the frontlines. Regardless of where you find yourself, we all know how easy it has become to get lost in a sea of overwhelming and depressing news online.

If you are like me, you chuckle when you see your screen time report come up on Sunday morning, chronicling your time spent the past week on your smartphone. Our entire life is being lived out online in many respects with video conferencing, social media grazing, online education, and so much more. Before we know it, we're stuck in an endless vortex of news, updates, and some really funny memes.

A couple of weeks ago, an email newsletter from *The New York Times* about this very thing caught my attention. Kevin Roose, a writer-at-large at the *Times*, wrote an article where he described the concept of “doomsurfing”—spending endless amounts of time online, often drowning in coronavirus content and unsettling ourselves to the point of physical discomfort. This concept struck me because it so clearly explains what many of us find ourselves doing: searching for answers and some semblance of hope in the midst of the havoc we're experiencing. But while Roose recommends coping strategies and even self-care, Christians have a greater hope amid the doom, even as we still continue to search for answers as to why this is happening and what can be done.

## **Technology and the human soul**

Before we explore the peace we have in the midst of uncertainty, we need to examine why we go into these online doomsurfing excursions in the first place. Technology was given to us by God as a tool to use as we seek to honor God and love our neighbors in this broken world. Just as early technologies like the

shovel and the hoe made our manual labor easier and extended our physical abilities, today's technologies open up a world of information and access to the ends of earth in ways that our ancestors would have found astounding.

But our sinful and prideful hearts still misuse, abuse, and seek things in these tools that are dangerous for our souls. We often try to use these technologies in order to be "gods" ourselves instead of living contentedly as the only creature made in God's image. We begin to twist and manipulate these tools in order to serve ourselves rather than serve the One who made everything we have ever known.

We mistakenly look to these technologies as a source of hope and certainty in an uncertain world, often tricking ourselves into believing that if we just find out that last bit of breaking news, the latest testing numbers, or even the rate of spread then we might have just enough knowledge or understanding to obtain some semblance of peace.

We can engage in the proper use of technology only when we remember that God is our hope and refuge in the midst of the storm. Instead of getting lost in the news of the day as we long for control and peace, we can cling to the One who calls to us to flee to him in the midst of our suffering.

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Of course, there is nothing wrong about being informed and educated. But for all of the promises of modern technologies, we will find ourselves always longing for more, never satisfying the craving for knowledge and an abiding

calm. These tools will never satisfy us, nor will they ever show us the right information to make us feel the peace that we so diligently seek in this pandemic.

## **A psalm for the digital age**

One of the goals I set for myself when my family went into full isolation a few weeks back because of my wife's compromised immune system was to read through the book of Psalms. At just five psalms a day, you can read the entire collection in about 30 days. A few days ago, I read Psalm 46 and was reminded afresh of God's saving presence and refuge in the midst of the doomsurfing and longing for answers.

Psalm 46 is one of my favorite psalms and has been a source of peace for me throughout the darkest of seasons of my life, including this current season of my wife's cancer and the spread of COVID-19 throughout the world. The psalmist writes, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (v. 1). He continues to explain that although the earth gives way, the waters roar, the nations rage, and the world seems to be splitting apart at the seams, God is still in control of every aspect of our lives and serves as our refuge and strength throughout it all.

In this international crisis and pandemic, it will be even easier for us to find ourselves enamoured with our devices, longing for answers and control as we get lost in doomsurfing, all while trying to distract ourselves from the pain and suffering all around us. As we seek the peace and comfort that we long for in all of the wrong places, as Christians, we know that God himself isn't sitting on the sidelines.

Our God is with us through our pain, the confusion and doubt, and especially in the midst of a world that seems to be showing the deepest scars of the fall. Instead of getting lost in our devices, surfing the web and social media for new information and answers, maybe we need to simply put down these tools for a moment and meditate on the One holding the entire universe together in his hands.

The psalmist concludes by saying:

God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;

God will help her when morning dawns.

The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;

he utters his voice, the earth melts.

The Lord of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our fortress . . .

“Be still, and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth!”

The Lord of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our fortress.

We can engage in the proper use of technology only when we remember that God is our hope and refuge in the midst of the storm. Instead of getting lost in the news of the day as we long for control and peace, we can cling to the One who calls to us to flee to him in the midst of our suffering. As the psalmist says, God is indeed our fortress, especially amid the temptation to find our peace while doomsurfing.

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Jason Thacker serves as chair of research in technology ethics and creative director at ERLC. In his role as creative director, he oversees the communications team, including all creative design projects. His new book, *The Age of AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity*, releases March 2020 with Zondervan. He is a ... [Read More \(https://erlc.com/multi\\_author/jason-thacker/\)](https://erlc.com/multi_author/jason-thacker/)

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