MISSIONS IN THE METAVERSE:
RECONCILING HUMANITY WITH THEIR CREATOR
BY REACHING THEM WHERE THEY LIVE,
ON THEIR DEVICES, VIA
DIGITAL MISSIONS

Full Paper: www.SpiritualWarfare.blog/digital-missions
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Thesis: The Metaverse is less about virtual reality and more about the increasing reality of people living (time spent communicating and connecting) in digital places. Christians have the imperative and opportunity to enter the digital realm in order to effectively reach and teach souls with Jesus' Scriptural truth and love.

Why Digital Missions? The Biblical Foundations & Imperatives

What is the metaverse? The metaverse is an increasingly common reference to a developing internet where there is an integration "of the available technologies into a more immersive experience, decentralizing, democratizing information" (Nieuwhof CNLP470 2022). In simple terms, the metaverse is a more interactive online experience with both virtual (three dimension) and augmented (real world and internet interconnected) experiences.

Why does it matter? This paper shows that people increasingly "live" on digital devices, spending the vast majority of their day looking at, thinking about, and interacting with their screens. Real mental, emotional, and spiritual communication and connections occur through this developing "metaverse" and the goals of many companies is to increase the "screen time" of the world's population.

What is the concept of "digital missions" and is it biblical? In-person missionaries cross real-world boundaries with an in-person presence to reach the lost and disciple the saved. Digital missionaries cross real-world boundaries with a digital presence to reach the lost and disciple the saved. While in-person missions will be shown to be the biblical ideal, digital missions will be shown both to be biblically permissible and a statistical necessity and imperative.

This paper is just a beginning. More research and writing are needed on this important topic. It is my hope that as the world grows increasingly digital, Christians must consider the available options for reaching and teaching souls with Jesus' Scriptural truth and love. Our Christian churches, denominations, ministries, missions agencies, and seminaries must consider strategically and tactically how to engage in digital missions. In an ever-changing digital environment, theologians must help the church consider which means are biblically permissible to help us effectively and rapidly spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth.[1]

A Biblical Theology of Digital Missions

Are digital mission strategies a biblical approach to reconciliation? Can reconciliation genuinely occur through digital media and platforms? Can evangelism and discipleship happen effectively and biblically across geographic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries without an in-

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[1] Please see www.SpiritualWarfare.blog/digital-missions-scriptures for a more comprehensive listing of this scriptural survey to consider in digital missions.

person presence? Here are some helpful considerations when looking at both Gospel communication and spiritual connections. Paul's epistles are a particularly helpful example when evaluating the means and prioritization of digital missions and digital missionaries.

Here are some scriptural examples of God's communication and connection to us as He reconciles us to Himself in salvation and carries the message of reconciliation through us to the world (Ephesians 2:14-16, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Some of these passages emphasize the importance, necessity, and priority of in-person communication and connection. Several passages illustrate that some aspects of reconciliation may happen at a distance and through means that are not "in-person." These examples help us to consider where digital means may be effective in evangelism and discipleship for digital missions.

Prophecies, **Dreams & Visions.** The Lord often used prophetic messengers who used both spoken and written means of communication with the people to whom they were sent. The Lord spoke directly to these prophets often through non-physical means such as dreams and visions (Deuteronomy 18:22). This non-physical means of spiritual communication from and connection with God is promised to continue into the future through the sending of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28–29). In a similar way, a non-physical vision also prompts Paul to go Macedonia to preach (Acts 16:9). God use of prophecies, dreams, and visions should caution us from restricting the concept of evangelism and missions to solely existing through in-person communication and connection.

Theophanies & Angelic Appearances. God also appears supernaturally Himself (theophany) or through the sending of His angelic messengers to bring real spiritual communication and connection. This occurs in many places and to many believers and non-believers across the Old and New Testaments and is promised to continue through Jesus' return.[2] These in-person appearances of God and through His angelic beings illustrate the importance of in-person communication and connection. While digital means may be shown to be biblical and effective, it seems that the ideal for a Christian missions presence would be in-person when possible. The incarnation of Jesus in the primary example of the primacy of in-person missions.

In-Person Ministry. Much of Jesus' ministry was dedicated to direct, physical encounters with His audience rather than settling on an indirect word-of-mouth ministry. Jesus prioritized in-person encounters (Matthew 11:1) with crowds, followers, and individuals. He also sent out His disciples to preach the Gospel and use their gifting to show God's love and speak God's truth (Mark 3:14–15, Matthew 28:19–20, Acts 1:8). These descriptions and commands were for a missions' task of direct, in-person communication and connection all across the world. Jesus' coming in the flesh shows the importance of the in-person missions' task for the task of reconciliation. Many of the below examples however allow for and encourage the effective use of distanced-means for the task of reconciliation through Christian missions.

Limited Workers. Incarnate Jesus had limited time and opportunities in ministry. Since He could not go everywhere, He sent others ahead of Him and beyond Him (Luke 10:1-2, Matthew 9:37-38). The urgency and overwhelming need of the missions' task should drive Christians to desperate and dependent prayer for more missionary workers to reach and teach more souls. God has given His followers the message and "ministry of reconciliation" as His representatives (2 Corinthians 5:18–20). God chooses to make His appeal globally known through the calling out of His people.

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[2] Please see examples at: www.spiritualwarfare.blog/miracles-of-god.

Acoustics & Visibility. In several situations Jesus speaks to large crowds. In pre-amplification eras, there were limited options for expanding the reach of one's voice and the visibility of one's presence in public speaking. It at least two instances, Jesus chooses a place to preach where He could maximize His reach. In Matthew 5 Jesus goes up on a mountain above the crowds in a way to feasibly help with the projection of His voice over the crowd. In Mark 4:1 and Luke 5:3 Jesus gets into a boat and puts out a little so that His teaching could be better heard and seen. In a similar fashion, missionaries should consider what "places" might be more effective in their means of reaching the overwhelming crowds with the Gospel message.

The Outcasts. Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:12-24) illustrates the calling God has given us to reach into hard places for the outcasts and bring them into Christ's saving presence. He also communicates the need to go to the "highways" and "hedgerows" as calling out of our familiar areas in order to reach foreigners and outcasts with strong urging to receive the Gospel invitation. Missions ministries should consider where groups of people have less access as "outcasts" and need a more intentional and focused effort to compel them into Christ's loving embrace.

Anonymous or Secretive Encounters. Is it ok to provide pathways for hearing about and encountering Jesus in more private or safe locations? Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, likely out of concerns for his own safety (John 3:1–2). Later on, by day, Nicodemus brings an expensive offering for the care and preparation of Jesus' body (John 19:39). Yet others approach Jesus for healing by proximity in moving forward to touch His clothes or to be touched by Jesus (Mark 6:56, Matthew 8:3). Those who were unable to come into Jesus' presence were brought by their friends into His presence for healing (Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26). One woman came to encounter Jesus by hiding herself only later to reveal herself (Luke 8:43-48). Although Jesus most often heals in proximity, occasionally he heals at a distance without His physical presence (Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10). Sometimes anonymous, stealthy, secretive, or non-physical encounters can allow Gospel conversations and connections that may not happen otherwise (think digital encounters and anonymity opportunities with avatars). Digital missions may allow for the gathering of larger crowds from restrictive locations where the listeners may not feel exposed and may be more vulnerable and open to hearing the Gospel message of reconciliation.

The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in non-physical ways that we cannot fully understand through His indwelling presence in believers (Acts 2:4, Romans 8:11). Believers, even when not physically present with one another, have a connection and union with one another through the Holy Spirit as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12–13, Ephesians 4:4–6). All Christians are indwelt with God the Holy Spirit who connects to us and communicates to us. There is a real union between Christians through the Holy Spirit that transcends physical and temporal boundaries. God's Spirit can genuinely work in digital missions through the crossing of geographic, national, linguistic, and cultural boundaries through digital means.

Sermons and Songs. The Scriptures include songs that are transcribed for the reception and reading of others beyond the initial time of praise and worship by Moses, David, Mary, and others (Deuteronomy 32:1-44, Psalms, Luke 1:46-56, Revelation 15:3). Likewise, sermons are recorded and shared beyond the original audience for evangelistic and discipleship purposes (Matthew 5-7, Acts 2:14-41). The transcription and communication of sermons and songs in the Scriptures is a great example of why we should share what happens in our worship services (live stream) with those outside of our physical gatherings. The Bible clearly shows that in-person gathering is always necessary to constitute a local church (Carl 2022, "Online Church"), but

some of the evangelistic and discipleship functions of the church may be effectively carried out from local gatherings of churches through both in-person and digital missionaries.

Various Locations & Responses. Gospel ministry wasn't confined to particular locations in the New Testament. Believers went into temples, homes, synagogues, marketplaces and other places where people would gather for prayer or discussion (Acts 5:42, Acts 16:12–14, Acts 17:16–21, Acts 17:22–23, Acts 18:4, Acts 20:20). Such passages remind us that the Christian call is to go wherever they can gain a hearing to teach and preach about Jesus. Places of worship and private homes are great opportunities for in depth Bible conversations. Believers should also seek Gospel sharing opportunities where people come together to maximize the Kingdom impact and reach. Followers of Christ should go into both religious and secular settings as Paul's exemplified in going to synagogues, marketplaces, and wherever the invitation or opportunity is allowed. We are called to preach in such settings with boldness and cultural awareness to diverse. Digital missions provide continuous opportunities to reach innumerable audiences across the globe.

Ignoring External Identities. Believers are reminded that in Christ, "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (Romans 10:11-13 [ESV]) and that we should no longer look at anyone "according to the flesh" (2 Corinthians 5:16-17 [ESV]). God saves souls regardless of national, cultural, or religious background. We need these reminders to not merely see or think of people by their physical appearance (Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11) as our earthly identities do not matter compared with our spiritual identity in union with Jesus. The use of pseudonyms and avatars in the digital realm may have the unintentional benefit of not pre-judging our audience by their external appearances. Such false self-chosen identities may also conversely require the reminders to not judge someone by what appears on your screen. As we consider digital missions we must think biblically about emerging advantages and challenges.

Various Opportunities, Time, & Approaches. Some missionary encounters may be short-lived while others may be long-lasting. Obstacles to reaching one's target audience may be significant and difficult to overcome or bypass (Romans 15:22–28). Some missionary tasks, such as bringing financial aid from one church to another, no longer require the formerly arduous, long journey of past biblical days but can be done today with a few touches on a screen without an in-person presence. What other digital tools help us accomplish biblical missionary tasks more effectively, efficiently, and rapidly?

Paul also explains that he communicates and connects differently when he is at a distance and when he is face to face. He remarks that "I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!" (2 Corinthians 10:1–2 [ESV]). Positively, we may notice similar tendencies in ourselves when physical proximity encourages humility and physical distance prompts courageous communication. Conversely, we may be warned of temptations to be less courageous in person and overly harsh when online or at a distance. Gospel humility, preparedness, and clarity is important in whichever dimension we get to communicate and connect with the command to "do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15 [ESV]).

Real Spiritual and Emotional Connection. Are online avenues real routes for evangelism, discipleship, and missions? What about those who never get to see a Christian "face to face"? Paul speaks to believers in the church at Colossae and says that "though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ" (Colossians 2:1–5 [ESV]). This is a significant passage and should not be overlooked in regards to digital missions. We can see that even without physical presence, there is a spiritual union between believers that transcends our face to face limitations.

Paul also writes to the church at Thessalonica when he was "torn away" from them, describing that it was separation "in person not in heart," alluding to a spiritual and emotional union that cannot be entirely broken between believers (1 Thessalonians 2:17–18 [ESV]). He also explains that this separation was a goal and work of Satan, saying that "Satan hindered us" from such an in-person visit. Nevertheless, Paul continues to have a "great desire to see you face to face." While in person separation can be difficult, emotional, mental, and spiritual connections are real even at a distance. Satan actively attempts to keep believers physically separated from one another. We must be aware of the devil's schemes and we should always endeavor to be connected to one another in person wherever possible. Where an in-person presence is not possible, a digital missionary presence can still effectively evangelize and disciple.

Desire to Be In-Person. In several places we see both that Paul and John express that in-person disciple-making is the ideal and to be desired. Paul explains that "we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith" (1 Thessalonians 3:9–10 [ESV]). Such urgent prayers seems to indicate that a physical presence can provide for spiritual growth which cannot occur solely through communication from a distance. Peter also expresses that he "would rather not use paper and ink" but "hopes to see you soon and talk face to face" (2 John 12, 3 John13-14 [ESV]). He also emphasizes that such in person communication and connection brings about a fuller experience of joy. Written, or less personal correspondence, is important and helpful but has its limitations. When Christian missionaries are impeded from being present with their targeted people groups, they should follow the example of Paul and John by using modern day "paper and ink" that is possible through digital media.

Summary. We can conclude from this brief scriptural survey that missions efforts are both biblically permissible and effective in both evangelistic and discipleship tasks through a non-physical presence. While such approaches are possible, the in-person presence is always to be sought as the most effective means of Gospel communication and connection. Such biblical examples must be closely evaluated and remembered as we attempt new digital means of missiological evangelism and discipleship. Simultaneously we must always champion the creation and continuation of in-person church gatherings as the biblical goal for our regular ways of being known, serving, worshiping, evangelizing, praying, learning, and giving.

The scriptures are a sufficient source of communication for reconciling humanity with their Creator. The Bible can be communicated both in-person and by other mediums of communication (written and oral communication and digital). The church can carry the Gospel out and teach the scriptures digitally, but it cannot fully function as the body of Christ solely in the digital realm (Carl 2022).[3] While pursing in-person opportunities, missionaries should evaluate their specific calling in order to understand which evangelistic, discipleship, and missional tasks can be accomplished in the digital realm. These scriptural examples show us that connections in the digital realm are real spiritual, mental, and emotional connections even without a physical presence.
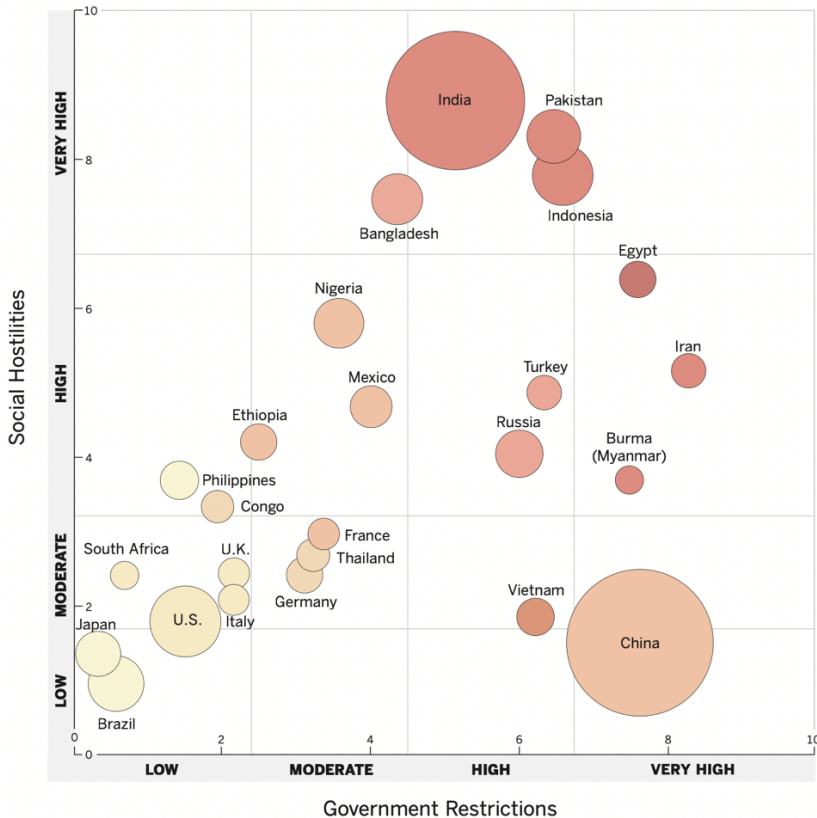
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[3] Is Online Church Really a Church? What Does the Bible Say About 'Online Church'"? (www.trustworthyword.com/online-church). What Does the Bible Say About Church Membership? (www.trustworthyword.com/what-does-the-bible-say-about-church-membership). What Does the Bible Say About Risk? (www.trustworthyword.com/risk).

Why Digital Missions? The Statistical Realities & Opportunities

There are 7.83 billion people in the world and almost 70% of them "live in religiously restrictive countries" (Joshua Project - People Groups 2022). What do these numbers mean for our missionary calling? How do these statistics impact our prioritization of digital missions?

Christian organizations have often lagged behind society in adapting to technological changes and missed out on key opportunities for gospel reach. The history of Christian missions demonstrates an ever-present urgency to go to the lost wherever they live. Increasingly, the lost "live" on their digital devices. Christian missionaries must "go" to the lost on their devices, obtaining a fraction of their screen-time attention for the sake of their souls. This paper will share the statistics to demonstrate the importance of understanding the evolving digital age of the metaverse.[4]

The Difficulty. *How many souls are extremely difficult to reach & teach in-person?* At least 5.5 billion souls. Jesus explains the numerical harvest that is waiting (Matthew 9:37-38) and statistics can quantify many of the unreached. Surveys and research can explain that our restricted access to the nations can "result from government actions, policies and laws" (Pew Research Global Restrictions on Religion 2009). Other missiological impediments can arise "from hostile acts by private individuals, organizations and social groups" (Ibid). Here is a helpful chart to visualize the restricted access issues today:

Missiological Challenges within the Church. Missional challenges exist not merely outside the church, but also internal to the churches who are called to go and send. Low frequencies of scripture reading (Pew Research Scripture Reading 2014) and worship attendance (Pew Research Attendance at Religious Services 2014) have stunted the spiritual growth of believers. Generosity is significantly low and mis-prioritized as well (The Traveling Team 2022). Christians are estimated to make up 33% of the world's population, but disproportionally receive "53% of the world's annual income" and unfortunately "spend 98% of it on themselves" (Barrett and Johnson 2001, 656). When money is given from Christians through their churches, 95% is spent domestically and "only 4.5% on cross-cultural efforts among already reached people groups, and .5% to reach the unreached" (The Traveling Team 2022). Christian dedication to scripture reading, church attendance, and financial giving is a serious impediment to mobilizing much needed Gospel missions.

Missiological Assignments and Funding. The missiological challenges extend beyond the local churches into the missions agencies. The reality of missions assignments is that "90% of foreign missionaries work among already reached people groups. 10% work among unreached people groups" (Winter and Koch, 543). Corresponding with personnel assignments, funding priorities can be seen in international missions when "87% goes for work among those already Christian. 12% for work among already evangelized, but non-Christian. 1% is given for work among the unevangelized and unreached people" (Baxter 2007, 12). While United States mission agencies may have access to over $5.2 billion in funding (Weber and Welliver 2007, 13), some countries such as Switzerland may cost 700 times as much per capita to reach than in poor unevangelized countries such as Nepal (World Evangelization Research Center). The missions task is overwhelming and the decisions for missions assignments and funding must be complex. With limited resources and personnel there is a compounding difficulty of reaching the unreached without an in person missionary presence.

Global Lostness. Since Jesus ascended to Heaven, approximately 67% of all humanity has never heard His name and "70,000+ people die every day in the unreached world without Jesus" (Baxter 2007, 12). Out of the world's population of 7.83 billion only 7.9% confess to a biblical faith (evangelical), amounting to a possible 619 million souls claiming faith in Jesus (Operation World 2022). What about the 7,210,000,000 souls who do not currently claim Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? This vast number should overwhelm us with grief. Our Christian call is to be burdened for each and every one of these souls. The missionary task of every believer is to go and tell. We must remember Jesus' words that, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:37–38 [ESV]).

Limited Missionary Numbers. How many laborers are among the harvest currently? Not enough. There are only "140,000 recorded protestant missionaries serving in the world, with 64,000 from the US" (The Traveling Team 2022). When we compare these missionary numbers with assignments, we see some overwhelming ratios. There is only one missionary for every 60,000 members of tribal religions. There is only one missionary for every 71,000 "unreligious" peoples. There is only one missionary for every 179,000 Hindus. There is only one missionary for every 260,000 Buddhists. There is only one missionary for every 405,500 Muslims (Ibid).

The status quo is unacceptable. While seeking additional funding and mobilization for in-person missionaries we must consider the developing opportunities in digital missions. We must find a way to get the Gospel clearly proclaimed to every soul on planet earth. How can we change? What must we do to see more souls hearing the Gospel news? How can we reach and

teach more with the call of discipleship? We must consider the opportunities available in digital missions.

The Statistics of Digital Change

Have you noticed the changes where you live? Over the past decade, a significant change has occurred around us. More and more souls have a phone in their pocket or purse. More and more people spend their time with their eyes focused on their screens. More and more of God's image-bearers are communicating and connecting with others through "screen time."[5]

Digital Preference. While radio and print used to dominate as forms of communication, people are shifting their attention to digital devices. One example is in news consumption, with "half of Americans say they prefer a digital device" for their news (Pew Research News Platform 2021). Advertising revenue is one way to track where people can be accessed, and "digital advertising grew to $152 billion in 2020" amounting to "63% of all advertising revenue" (Pew Research Digital News 2021).

Digital preference is not simply an increasing phenomenon among adults, but "fully 89% of parents of a child age 5 to 11 say their child watches videos on YouTube" with "53% reporting that their child does this daily" (Auxier, Anderson, Perrin, and Turner 2020). All ages are showing their increasing desire for digital consumption. How does such desire connect with digital access?

Digital Access. As of 2021, 97% of all Americans own a cellphone with 85% of all Americans owning an internet-accessing "smartphone" (Pew Research Mobile 2021). Almost 75% of all U.S. adults additionally own a desktop or laptop computer, while "while roughly half own a tablet computer (Pew Research Mobile 2021). Is this digital access merely a phenomenon in the United States? No, this is a global trend.

Over 78% of the world's population is estimated to have access to smartphones based on "an estimated 6.4 billion smartphone subscriptions worldwide and a global population of around 7.8 billion" (O'Dea 2021). Even in poverty stricken Sub-Saharan Africa, 48% of the population has smartphone access (Ibid). In the next five years, smartphone subscriptions are estimated to expand to 7.69 billion (Ibid). This trend is not merely among younger generations, but "about half (53%) of people 65 and older are smartphone owners" (Livingston 2019).

While "internet use is nearly universal in most advanced economies surveyed" among "emerging economies, about half or more use the internet in every country but India" (Silver 2019). Cumulatively it is estimated that 59.5% of world's population is using the internet (Moody 2021). Not only is access increasing through the internet and devices, but the speed of access is making such online usage more effective ("average mobile internet speed = 42.7Mbps, fixed = 96.43Mbps" (Moody 2021). Digital access is a window of opportunity into the souls of the lost.

Digital "Screen Time." Not only to people have access to digital devices and the internet, but they are increasingly spending large portions of their daily life "living" on the internet. "Screen time" is the phrase used to describe the time spent looking at a digital device. U.S. teenagers spend 7.7 hours a day outside of school on their screens (Rodriguez 2021). Globally, digital content is consumed an average of six hours and fifty-nine minutes when digital

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[5] Please see www.SpiritualWarfare.blog/digital-missions-research for a more comprehensive listing of relevant digital statistics to consider for digital missions.

media such as phone, TV, and other forms are included (Koetsier 2020). Mobile devices are being used by the average person for over 25% of their daily time awake and half of U.S. residents spend most of their days on their screens (Ibid). This trend is affecting all ages in the United States significantly (Livingston 2019, Schaeffer 2019, and CDC 2022).

Screen time is showing up in significant ways globally as well. Egyptians spend 41% of their daily screen time on social media while Saudi Arabians spend 40% (Moody 2021). Across the planet, "the average person spends 2 hours and 25 minutes on social media each day" (Moody 2021). Filipinos ranks highest in screen time international with almost 11 hours a day of screen time, almost 6 hours of which is spent on mobile devices (Ibid). Worldwide, the average person has 8.4 social media accounts and spends 6 hours and 55 minutes on digital devices (Ibid). How can this screen time be leveraged for Gospel missions?

The vast majority of the world now has internet and smartphone access. A significant portion of their waking day is spent looking into a screen. Christian missions must become strategically digital to reach them where their attention is most focused, on their devices.

The phenomenon of digitization is not restricted to a particular region or age group, it is global. While the numbers may vary among people and places, global digitization is rapidly increasing. This is an opportunity for Christian missions that must not be missed. Some call this emerging trend of living online as the "metaverse." The apparent and developing reality is that "physical spaces and virtual spaces will be seamlessly integrated, and digital technologies will disappear so completely into our lives and surrounding environments that we will barely notice it" (Anderson and Rainie 2022).

How do these missions and digitization statistics intersect? Why do they matter? We must consider the calling that the Lord has given us. Whether it is a particular people group or place, we have opportunities today that we cannot ignore. Digital missions must be implemented and increased rapidly for the sake of the 70,000+ lost souls that are dying daily and entering an eternity in Hell.

What to Do in Digital Missions: Understanding the Digital Realm

The developmental direction of technology has increased communication and connection in scope, depth, and speed. Historically, we have seen such immense social change produced from the printing press to audio and image recording technologies. The invention of electricity and moving pictures and radically transformed the world we live in and how we spend our time. The development of the internet has allowed worldwide communication and connection to take place in milliseconds. The ongoing development of "Web3/Metaverse" will continue the increasing trend of digitization and will likely result in more access and time spent on digital devices.[6]

Does the metaverse matter? The renaming of Facebook's parent company as Meta is not an isolated event or outlier. Major companies like Microsoft, Google, and Apple as well as thousands of small companies are investing significant resources and attention into the digital realm (The Street 2022, Reuters 2022). Such widespread investments are a key signal for the increased importance of understanding and utilizing augmented and virtual reality as a real "place" where people "go" to meet people.

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[6] Please see www.SpiritualWarfare.blog/digital-missions-research for a more comprehensive listing of relevant digital statistics to consider for digital missions.

The current practices in the metaverse are in taking existing digital spaces into a more interactive and three-dimensional experience. Virtual reality devices like the "Oculus" already allow numerous opportunities for social events, gatherings, gaming, sports, entertainment, sports, education, and exercise (Oculus 2022). Augmented reality will increase and be impossible to ignore. Many have referenced the metaverse as something you have to experience yourself to fully understand, invoking and modifying Morpheus' statement from the movie *The Matrix*, "you can't explain what the Matrix [Metaverse] is, you have to experience it for yourself" (Nieuwhof CNLP470 2022).

What is the goal of Christian missions? Many Christian writers have explained it to be the task of crossing boundaries (whether geographical, cultural, linguistic, or governmental) with the purpose of making disciples of Jesus. Zane Pratt, Vice President for Global Training with the International Missions Board affirms that, "a missionary is nothing more than a disciple of Jesus, who makes disciples of Jesus, where Jesus is not known yet" (Akin 2022).

What then is "digital missions"? *Digital missions is the task of intentionally entering into the digital world to make disciples of Jesus.*

Who then are "digital missionaries"? *Digital missionaries are those disciples of Jesus who intentionally enter the digital world to make disciples of Jesus.*

Consider your own current digital practices. Look at your phone or device's "screen time" calculations. How many devices do you own and use? Where do you think you could be more effective missionally with digital means and methodologies for the cause of Christ? What if every Christian with digital devices and internet access began to intentionally enter the digital world with the purpose of making disciples of Jesus?

How to Do Digital Missions:
Urgent Next Steps for Reconciling Humanity with their Creator

Seeing these concerning missions statistics and the developing global digital access should prompt us to consider how we might "go" online more effectively to reach and teach the nations.[7] Missionaries have been inventive and creative for centuries in discovering ways to access and reach the nations with the Gospel. Missionaries have been brave and diligent in going to the world to make disciples of Jesus. We need digital missionaries today who are inventive, creative, brave, and diligent to enter the digital world with the purpose of evangelism and discipleship.

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[7] Please see www.SpiritualWarfare.blog/missions-in-metaverse-research for a more comprehensive listing of relevant research on missions in the metaverse.

Spiritual Cyber Warfare. Modern day military warfare has increasingly found avenues of offense and defense in an evolving era of "cyber warfare" (U.S. Cyber Command 2022). Satan has modeled *spiritual cyber warfare* by effectively utilizing digital strategies both to enslave the lost and to impede the saints' approaches to evangelism, discipleship, and missions. Online addictions are real in pornography, gambling, gaming, nonstop entertainment, and the appeal of false teachings. Christians must counter these attacks more effectively with both defensive and offensive approaches of engagement in spiritual "cyber warfare" for the sake of the lost. Here are some digital missions strategies, tactics, and challenges that Christian churches, organizations, and agencies should take under serious consideration.

Spiritual Force Multipliers. A "force multiplier" is military terminology for technology or techniques that magnify your effectiveness on the battlefield. Digital missions is a spiritual "*combat or force multiplier*" that missionaries cannot ignore. Cyber approaches can effectively strengthen and broaden their effectiveness in reaching the lost and discipling the saved. Missions agencies and organizations, as well as missional seminaries and churches, must enter into a significant season of self-evaluation in order to adapt their strategies and staffing to this emerging age. If a denominational agency has an "international missions" and a "national missions" group, it needs to immediately start a "digital missions" group. Seminaries and conventions need to train, equip, and motivate their students and members to be digital missionaries now. There is an urgent need to implement new tactical approaches for immediate impact and future foundational frameworks. Here are some specific next steps to consider for more effective reconciliation via digital missions.

Digital Missions Strategies. In a military context, strategies are higher-level considerations for how to defend against, engage with, and defeat one's enemies. Christian missionaries must ask themselves higher-level questions in evaluating their established purpose and vision. They must consider the timing (when), audience (where and who), leadership and workers (who), available equipment/resources (what), and the skills, budget, training, and approach (how) for their mission success. As these big-picture questions are considered, assessed, and addressed a more focused strategy can be developed with the integration and increase of digital missions. Each organization and individual should conduct research, both religious and secular, as to how digital strategies are being developed elsewhere. While many individual Christians and churches are accomplishing digital missions independently, few Christian organizations (other than Cru) are demonstrating any sort of organized, strategic approach to digital missions.[8] We must act with urgency to organize the church for the important task of digital missions and mobilizing digital missionaries.

Digital Missions Tactics. Militarily tactics are the application of strategies at an individual or small unit level. Christian leaders, teams, and workers need to think tactically about their battle which is "not with flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:10-20 [ESV]). How digital tools be used as both the spiritual armor and weapons in the digital places into which God has placed you? The situations are too numerous and diverse to consider wholistically here, but are some thoughtful questions and ideas that may prayerfully birth Spirit-led implementations and tactical approaches to your own missionary work:

• Self-evaluate – What are your current digital practices?
  • How have your previously organized and strategized your digital missions work?
  • Where are you strong? Where are you weak?

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[8] See Cru's example of digital ministry as one of the few strategic approaches to digital ministry: https://www.cru.org/us/en/digitalministry.html.

- What financial and personnel resources do you need to grow in your digital outreach?
- How frequently do you need to calendar re-evaluations?
- Try & Learn – What can you research, explore, & experiment with now?
  - What organizations are ahead of you? How can their example inspire and help you?
  - Who do you need to interview and learn from?
  - What books do you need to read?
  - What videos do you need to watch?
  - How can you start experimenting now?
  - How will you resource and evaluate these experiments?
  - Who will lead and serve in such efforts?
  - What goals can you set? Are they SMART? (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound/limited)?
  - What does digital "success" look like in your context?
- Watch & Brainstorm – Where can you go to be inspired in your creativity?
  - Watch & Discuss Future Focused Digital Films – "Inspector Gadget" (1983, 1999), "Matrix" (1999), "Minority Report" (2002), "Surrogates" (2009), "Avatar" (2009),**"Ready Player One" (2018)** (DISCLAIMER: Not endorsing the language and situations depicted, check reviews first for your own decision considering appropriateness for yourself and context.)
  - When can you conduct a brainstorming session? What would a successful brainstorming session produce? Where can you go and who can you bring to maximize success?
- Who Can You Find? – Who do you have already?
  - How can you encourage innovation within yourself and your organization?
  - What incentives and recognition might help?
  - Who is already working digitally within your organization? Outside your organization?
  - Who can you raise up in influence, resource, or empower?
  - Who needs to change positions to free up space and influence for another?
  - What outside resources can come to teach and lead your changes?
- Equip Trainers – What resources and time do they need?
  - What about initial entry training in your organization?
  - What about ongoing development and advanced training?
  - What is in your current syllabus or training manuals? What needs to be added? What needs to be modified? What needs to be deleted?
  - What assignments and expectations need to change?
  - What does this look like in churches?
  - What does this look like in seminaries?
  - What does this look like in lay ministries?
  - What does this look like in mission agencies?
  - What does this look like among mission teams?
- Examine Your Margin – Are you and your organization too busy?
  - What tasks/expectations can be eliminated or reduced to create margin?
  - What tasks/expectations must be added into that margin?
  - What is the priority and timeframe for change? What is too slow? What is too fast?
- Maximize Digital Presence & Content Creation – What is urgent?

- How are your websites (static content) and social media (interactive experiences) implementation currently? Where do you need to step it up? Where do you need help?
- What can you do now with your current resources and staffing?
- Some inspiration and ideas:
  - Go to current ministries and missions and think of 3D or digital versions of ways your missions or ministry has been successful before
  - Buy an Oculus for your organization and pass it around. Spend a full day in 3D.
  - Could missionaries or ministers be more available digitally?
  - Who does social media well? What can you imitate? Personalize?
  - What social media expectations and limitations should you have?
  - Take an in-person or digital field trip to foster content creation and innovate – Creation Museum, Ark Encounter, Bible Museum, Bible Map, Bible Storying (Creation to Christ) and consider how can you make things more "experiential" and less "informational"?
  - What content do you already have that can be digitized or distributed better?
  - What is being done in the locations, languages, and culture you feel called to? What can be done better? What gaps can you fill? Where do they like to spend their time digitally?
  - What digital events could you host?
  - What tourism is popular in your settings? How could that be a digital "hook"?
  - Create artificial intelligent "bots" that can have effective evangelistic and discipleship conversations. Use GotQuestions.org, the Bible Project, and LivingWaters.org as examples that might move into the 3D and AI realms? (think Christian Siri/Alexa/Google with an avatar)?
  - How can you use translation technology better? Immediately written and audio, bubble over your shoulder, sign language https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ordizc-8gvE @ 1:29
  - Could you host virtual Christian concerts? Language lessons? Exercise classes? Masters Courses? Health clinic?
  - Look at current ideas with Meta: https://www.oculus.com/experiences/quest/3002729676463989/
  - Watch YouTube VR 360 degree videos:
  - https://www.oculus.com/experiences/quest/2002317119880945/
  - Play to earn incentives – coins for attendance, participation
  - Provide VPN or Internet access with evangelism links
  - What is your digital advertising budget?
  - What is your social media following among non-believers?
  - Who could you recruit & hire Christian missionaries from FB, Instagram, YT, TikTok, Shorts, Reels

Digital Missions Challenges. Although the opportunities are vast in the digital realm there are some serious challenges that need to be considered. Whenever you take digital missions steps you need to anticipate and prepare for Satan's counterattacks and resistance. Here are some questions to consider as you consider the unique challenges of digital missions:

- What other organizations can you learn from by asking them about their difficult experiences?

- What do you need to consider on the platforms you will use? What are their reputations and temptations (think Snapchat and TikTok)? What addictions may they feed and what accountability do you need.
- As equipment evolves, do you have the budget to keep up with the rapidly required costs?
- What rules and regulations do you need internally for protection? What gatekeepers and obstacles can you expect where you go? (Anderson and Rainie 2021)
- What morally complex situations do you need to anticipate now?
- What are the inefficiencies, limitations, distractions, and discouragements you need to prepare for or avoid?
- How might you might be attacked? (i.e. critics, haters, trolls, ads, spammers, surveillance, cyber-bullies, predators, and identity thieves) How can you best protect those who gather to your digital missions?

Conclusion

Biblical truths and examples support the implementation and effectiveness of digital missions. The statistical needs of spiritual lostness and digital opportunities are numerous and convicting. The world around us is changing rapidly. We have the privilege and urgent calling to share the Good News of Christ to those who have never heard. There are real challenges with digital missions and much to learn about this ever-evolving media. We must see digital missions as a spiritual cyber warfare that can reach billions of souls rapidly if we plan strategically, implement tactically, and consider the obstacles and counterattacks that we will face. The Metaverse is not going away. Digital missions is an opportunity we cannot avoid or delay. May we pray to the Lord of the harvest to raise up and send out digital missionaries.

Thesis: The Metaverse is less about virtual reality and more about the increasing reality of people living (time spent communicating and connecting) in digital places. Christians have the imperative and opportunity to enter the digital realm in order to effectively reach and teach souls with Jesus' Scriptural truth and love.

Helpful Resources for Further Study
Full Bibliography: www.SpiritualWarfare.blog/full-digital-missions-bibliography