

IN THE MARGINS: Avoiding brain rot in a world full of distractions

By Tony Martin
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Have you ever scrolled through social media so long that you forgot why you even picked up your phone in the first place? Well, it turns out there's a name for that foggy, unproductive feeling: "brain rot." Yep, Oxford Languages has declared it the *Word of the Year* for 2024. Or rather, the *Words of the Year* – a little less catchy, but accurate.

When I first heard "brain rot," I had to laugh. It sounds like the kind of thing my grandma would've accused me of catching if I spent too much time watching reruns of *Gilligan's Island*. But Oxford defines it as "the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state," mostly thanks to bingeing low-quality content online. Sound familiar?

The term has skyrocketed in popularity, especially among Gen Z and Gen Alpha – the same people creating the content it's said to describe. There's something ironic about that – like eating a tub of Little Debbie's Christmas tree ice cream while watching documentaries about healthy living. Oxford's experts say the phrase is up 230% in usage this year, and I'd bet most of those mentions came from TikTok, the holy grail of quick-hit distractions.

But before we diss those of younger generations, let's be honest with ourselves: brain rot isn't just their problem. Who among us hasn't fallen into the endless scroll, losing an hour to cat videos, clickbait articles, or watching someone deep-fry a peanut butter sandwich? We've all been there.

Here's the thing, though – and this is where my Christian faith enters the conversation – the Bible reminds us of the importance of protecting our minds. Philippians 4:8 encourages us to focus on “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable.” Now, I'm not saying TikTok can't have moments of nobility (there *are* some great videos out there), but let's be real: much of what we consume online doesn't fit this description.

We live in a world overflowing with distractions, where “brain rot” lurks just a click away. But God designed our minds for so much more than passive consumption. He calls us to use our intellects for creativity, problem-solving, and loving others well. When we spend too much time scrolling, it's like letting spiritual junk food take over our diet. Our minds need nourishment, too, and that means feeding them with things that uplift, inspire, and draw us closer to Him.

So, how do we combat brain rot in our own lives? Here are a few ideas:

1. **Set Boundaries.** Schedule screen-free time each day to focus on activities that recharge your soul, like prayer, reading Scripture, or going for a walk.
2. **Choose Wisely.** Before you dive into an app, ask yourself, “Will this add value to my day, or am I just filling time?”
3. **Create Instead of Consume.** God made us in His image, which means we're designed to create, not just spectate. Whether it's journaling, baking, or building something with your hands, find ways to engage your mind.
4. **Stay Connected.** Social media can't replace real relationships. Make time to be present with loved ones – face to face, if possible.
5. **Pray for Discernment.** Ask God to help you steward your time and attention well. Psalm 90:12 says, “Teach us to

number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

There’s no need to throw our devices into the sea or delete all our apps (unless that’s what God’s calling you to do – in which case, I fully support it). Technology, like most things, isn’t inherently bad. It’s how we use it that matters. Let’s aim to use it wisely, in ways that build us up instead of breaking us down.

So, congrats to “brain rot” for its Word of the Year victory. Let’s hope it serves as a funny reminder to stay intentional about what we let into our minds. Because when we guard our hearts and focus our thoughts on things above, we’ll find the peace and purpose we’re all scrolling for.

That’s the kind of victory worth celebrating.

Amen?