

Pastor Mike's Bookshelf

Superbloom: How Technologies of Connection Tear Us Apart

Nicholas Carr

This week's book, *Superbloom*, explores the same terrain as last week's *Scrolling Ourselves to Death*: the unintended consequences of connection technologies. I strongly recommend both titles to anyone who spends time online. Each offers valuable research, insight, and wisdom about how digital technology shapes us—individually and collectively. Unlike *Scrolling Ourselves to Death*, *Superbloom* is not written from a Christian perspective or for explicitly Christian purposes. Nevertheless, the issues Carr raises carry profound spiritual implications, especially for those seeking to live faithfully in a digital age.

I could easily write a lengthy review—this book is deeply thought-provoking. Carr's observations have stayed with me, prompting ongoing reflection and conversation. I've recommended it to nearly everyone I know who enjoys reading. For this review, though, I'll focus on a few themes that intersect with Christian faith.

Carr notes that it's become common to blame algorithms—those used by search engines and social media—for much of the harm caused by digital technology. These AI-driven recommendations often lead us into rabbit holes, intellectual silos, and political echo chambers. Meanwhile, as we spend less time in face-to-face conversation, we lose the ability to engage constructively with those who disagree with us. The online world grows increasingly hostile—and that hostility spills into real life.

Carr agrees with this critique but insists it's only part of the story. Blaming big tech alone is too simplistic. These companies are, after all, businesses—designed to generate profit. They do this by keeping us online as long as possible, much like physical stores aim to keep us browsing. The longer we scroll, click, and surf, the more likely we are to engage, consume, and spend. And how do algorithms keep us hooked? By giving us exactly what we want. More of what we want. Always more.

This is where Carr's analysis leads me into spiritual reflection. The problem isn't just the algorithms. They're responding to us. The deeper issue is our own desires—our fallen nature. In real life, we're often protected from the consequences of getting everything we want. Online, those barriers vanish. Whatever I signal I want—gossip, outrage, conspiracy, indecency—I receive in abundance. And that abundance can draw me into places that dishonor Christ and diminish love for neighbor.

The root problem is not just technological. It's theological. It's our sinful humanity—our tendency to be “curved in on ourselves.” Literature has long warned of the danger of unchecked desire: from *Faust* to *The Great Gatsby* to *Willy Wonka*. Poets and novelists often grasp the fallenness of the human heart more clearly than tech designers. Their algorithms might work beautifully if people were naturally good. But we are not. We are mixed. We are fallen. Our default is self-service. Lord, have mercy.

That said, I'm not arguing that the online world is wholly bad. It's a tool—and like any tool, it can be used for good or ill. Carr reminds us that every new connection technology—from the printing press to smartphones—has disrupted society and reshaped how we think and live. Some changes are beneficial. Others are not. The danger today is that digital technology has become dominant so quickly, with so little reflection, that we've barely begun to understand how it's transforming us.

This is just one of the many important themes Carr explores in *Superbloom*. I could write a series of reflections on other aspects of the book, but for now, I simply want to encourage you to read it. Please do. I listened to the audiobook, but I plan to purchase a physical copy so I can revisit and mark the passages that struck me most.

Previous recommendations can be found here: <https://church.stjohnsnapa.org/resources/pastor-mikes-bookshelf>.

