

Technology: Provision or Problem?

Why, as Christians, do we need to think about technology?

1. **“Technology, at root, is an aspect of anthropology.”**¹ Anthropology is the study of the image of God. As Christians we are intensely interested in people.² Thinking about technology is part and parcel of thinking about the modern, human situation. Humans were created to know and experience God and to carry out His purpose; technology has a huge impact on this. “Technology is always an extension of the self.”³ ex. fork—hand; car—feet and arms; smartphone—mind & heart. A smartphone is more than a tool = our “second self.”⁴ Need to carefully observe our cultural situation if we are to minister to those in it. **Acts 17:23**—“carefully observing the objects of your worship.”
2. **“We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us.”**⁵ We need to think about how our digital technologies are shaping us. “Technology is only good if it can help us become the persons we were meant to be.”⁶ Technology has made our life *easier*, but has it made it *better*? Better = more human.

“Technology should always be judged by one question and one standard: does the technology make us more or make us less human?” –Romano Guardini, German-Italian philosopher

Is my smartphone usage shaping me into someone with the character to serve the Lord?⁷

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. A Good Listener | 5. Diligent |
| 2. A Lover of Men | 6. Restrained |
| 3. Having a Mind to Suffer | 7. Stable |
| 4. Buffeting the Body and Making It a Slave | 8. Not Subjective |

3. **“The technological enterprise has been and remains suffused with religious belief.”**⁸ “Behind the development of every major technology lies a vision.”⁹

ex. early apple logo, bitten apple with rainbow on it—technology promises to reverse the curse¹⁰

Early apple logo = a symbolic proclamation of the gospel of technology. A bitten apple imprinted with a rainbow. Both are Biblical allusions. The bitten fruit—a sign of man’s rebellion and fall from God’s purpose —and the rainbow—a sign of God’s promise to man to keep His covenant. The combination of the two applied to a computer company logo says that technology can overcome the curse.

Modern technological culture “steals the promises once held by the church—to heal, to satisfy, to bond, and to give a future.”¹¹

“Technology promises to relieve us of the burden of being merely human, of being finite creatures in a harsh and unyielding world.” -Albert Borgmann

¹ Nigel Cameron, “Technological Humanism,” faithandwork.com

² Watchman Nee, *Character of the Lord’s Worker*, Ch. 2. “All true servants of God are... interested, intensely interested, in men.”

³ Marshall McLuhan, *The Future of Man in the Electric Age*; quoted by Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You*, 26

⁴ Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*

⁵ John M. Culkin, “A schoolman’s guide to Marshall McLuhan.” *Saturday Review* (March 1967), 70

⁶ Andy Crouch, *The Tech-wise Family*, 63-64

⁷ These are some of the chapter titles from Nee’s, *Character of the Lord’s Worker*

⁸ David F Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention*, 5

⁹ Michael Heim, quoted by Brent Waters in, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World*, 49

¹⁰ Crouch, “Steve Jobs: The Secular Prophet,” *WSJ*, wsj.com (Oct. 8, 2011)

¹¹ Wes Avram, “Connecting with a Theology of Technology,” reflections.yale.edu (Fall 2011)

Makers of tech have explicit religious hopes. Users of tech develop implicit religious hopes.

Smartphones rival God in some ways—they're increasingly omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. The iPhone is the all-inclusive device and as such it rivals the all-inclusive Christ.

Presence—always with us

Power—iPhone GPS has 30,000x the processing speed of the navigational CPU on Apollo 11 lunar mission

Knowledge—1 billion websites

Connectivity—always connected, pushing, streaming, receiving

Where do we put our faith, love, and hope, devotion and awe—God or the machine? Modern idolatry (Isa. 44:12-20). Make idol using your craftsmanship (technology), then bow down to it and say save me. We want tech to do what only God can do.

“Every technological innovation is a new theological invitation for renewed biblical contemplation.”¹²

1 Chron. 12:32 Men who understood the times that they might know what Israel should do.

A biblical overview of technology

1. God's commission to man in the garden implies and presupposes human development of technology

Gen. 2:15 Jehovah God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

Technology = the scientific reordering of raw materials for human purposes.¹³ An iPhone is just reordered earth! Remember this is pre-fall, so it is very good. (Gen. 1:28)

2. The Lord sovereignly guides human history and technological development for His purpose

“Who brought about the intricate situation and the technological progress? The Lord did.”¹⁴

“All the progress in technology... is for the producing of the one new man.”¹⁵

God's move has always followed and utilized developments in human technology.

Dirty camel brought Rebekah to Isaac (Gen. 24:61-64).¹⁶ Camel = modern technology.

ex. Roman roads (gospel), printing press (Bible), Internet (universal fellowship)

3. Without God, man abuses technology for selfish and sinful purposes

Gen. 4—musical instruments (Jubal) and weapons (Tubal-cain) = distraction and destruction

Rom. 1:30 ...inventors of evil things...

Eph. 5:16 Redeeming the time for the days are evil.

“Every day is an evil day full of pernicious things that cause our time to be used ineffectively, to be reduced, and to be taken away.”¹⁷

¹² Tony Reinke, *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You*, 37

¹³ Reinke, 31

¹⁴ Lee, *Rising Up to Preach the Gospel*, Ch. 2

¹⁵ Lee, *CWWL 1977*, 3:401

¹⁶ Lee, *Life-study of Genesis*, 811

¹⁷ Recovery Version, Eph. 5:16, note 2

Two forms of evil (sin):¹⁸

1. Pride—arrogant, active rebellion. The counter-movement to the Lord’s condescension. Body of sin (Rom. 6:6). Lucifer (Isa. 14:13-14; 1 Tim. 3:6).
2. Sloth—sluggish, passive refusal. The counter-movement to the Lord’s elevation. Body of death (Rom. 7:24). Evil and slothful slave (Matt. 25:46).

1940

“As the end approaches the widespread abuse of technology and engineering will become even more apparent.”¹⁹

1 Cor. 6:12 All things are lawful to me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything.

Man was created to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. How silly would it be if the very thing we were created to have dominion over (and the very thing we created as an expression of our dominion), turned around and had dominion over us?

How Is Technology Negatively Affecting Us?

1. We are distracted

1 Cor. 7:35 This I say for your own profit, not that I may put a noose upon you but that you may be comely and may wait on the Lord without distraction.

v. 29 But this I say, brothers, the time is shortened...

Research shows that we touch, swipe or tap our phones 2,617 times a day.²⁰

We check our phones once every 4.3 minutes of our waking lives.²¹

A brother next to me watching a ministry video checked his phone 12x in 50 min.

With smartphones, a new economy has developed: **the attention economy**—the goal of almost every website or app is to do whatever it takes to keep you looking at it, in order to sell more ads. “Their aim is to maximize screen time.” It’s called persuasive design.

When Facebook was being developed the objective was: “How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?” It was this mindset that led to the creation of features such as the “like” button that would give users “a little dopamine hit” to encourage them to upload more content. “It’s a social-validation feedback loop... you’re exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology.”²² –Sean Parker, former Facebook president

“At Netflix, we are competing for our customers’ time, so our competitors include Snapchat, YouTube, sleep, etc.” –Reed Hastings, CEO of Netflix

In the attention economy, “Attention is a resource—a person has only so much of it.”²³ This should make us stop and ask, what is worth paying attention to?

Does your smartphone support your *intentions* OR sabotage your *attention*?²⁴

¹⁸ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/2*, 403-407

¹⁹ Nee, *Love Not the World*, Ch. 1

²⁰ Paul Lewis, “‘Our Minds Can Be Hijacked’: The Tech Insiders Who Fear a Smartphone Dystopia,” *The Guardian*, theguardian.com (Oct. 6 2017)

²¹ Reinke, 41

²² Olivia Solon, “Ex-Facebook President Sean Parker: Site Made to Exploit Human ‘Vulnerability’,” *The Guardian*, theguardian.com (Nov. 9, 2017)

²³ Matthew Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*, 11

²⁴ James Williams, *Stand out of our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy*, xi

Time lost bc of interruptions isn't limited to length of the interruption itself. On avg. it takes 23 min to regain focus, if interrupted in a focus state.²⁵ You lose 1) the time of the distraction 2) the time to recover from it and 3) the ability to resist it next time. Cost of distraction = interruption time, recovery time, next time.

Neuroplasticity—overtime this rewires our brain and conditions us for distraction. Studies have proven that, “The Mere Presence of One’s Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity.”²⁶

“I can make you put your phone down.” –Erykah Badu, (2015 song). Proves that the measure of desire / interest is that something can make you put your phone down. Can God make us put our phone down?

Satan knows he can never win, his strategy is to never loose. All he has to do is perpetually distract us and the Lord’s 2nd coming will be perpetually delayed.

Do our phones prevent us from deep, dramatic, encounters with the living God?
Distraction undermines our experience of Christ as reality.

ex. morning revival, church meetings, prayer, studying the Bible

Survey of 8,000 Christians—75% said they checked email and social media *before* morning revival.

1940

“Instead of removing our shoes from our feet because the place on which we stand is holy ground, we are taking nice photographs of the burning Bush, from suitable angles.”²⁷

Time is our most valuable commodity.

Concept about eternity: my experience right now really doesn’t matter bc even if I waste, eventually it will be completely out-shadowed by the immense duration of eternity. NOW is the only amount of time we take into eternity. “When some Christians are in eternity, they may not have very much of Christ to remember. Because they are not eating much of Christ today, they will not have much of Him to recall in eternity.”²⁸

Acts 10:19 While Peter was pondering over the vision, the Spirit said to him...

It’s when we ponder the vision that we get the Spirit’s further speaking. Why don’t you hear the Spirit’s speaking? Bc although you’ve seen something, you never spend time to ponder it.

Pondering requires:
1. Focus
2. Deep consideration
3. Time

Psa. 77:12 I will meditate on all that You have done and muse on Your doings.

1 Sam. 3:9 ...Speak, O Jehovah; for Your servant is listening...

2. We are disconnected

Eph. 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together...

How connected should we be? Look at how close the threads on your shirt are.

2 John 12 Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink, but I am hoping to be with you, and to speak face to face that our joy may be made full.

How to get connected

The flip side to being continuously distracted is that we are critically disconnected. We have lots of loose connection, but not much deep communion. Deep communion with one another involves presence, patience, time, trust, risk, work, commitment, love, and forgiveness.

²⁵ Blake Thorne, “How Distractions At Work Take Up More Time Than You Think,” blog.idonethis.com

²⁶ Adrian F. Ward et al., “Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One’s Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity,” journals.uchicago.edu

²⁷ J.S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine*, 152

²⁸ Lee, *Life-Study of Exodus*, Ch. 38

“Human nature is inherently social.”²⁹ “The desire to have a communal life was something created in the human nature by God... as a preparation for the church life.”³⁰ We are created in the image of the TG, in the image of an “Us.” One of the axioms of the Trinity = God is eternally relational.³¹ Each of the three Persons are defined by their *relation and interdependence* to each other, not by their *independence* from each other. We were created to express this kind of God. All creation manifests that God exists, but only the Body of Christ can manifest that the God who exists is TRIUNE. How well do our communities express the level of connection, oneness, and interdependence that is within the Triune God?

Our phones make this challenging because:

1. We are **bored** with the real world bc our habit of staring at screens has conditioned us to want “a level of vividness and velocity that does not exist in the real world—or only very rarely.”³²

ex. seeing a shooting star in person elicits a “wow” bc of its brilliance, speed, vividness, and rarity. It fills us with a sense of wonder and delight that we can trace back to God. But our phones serve up this kind of thing every moment and so we loose connection with the world and the people around us. We know we can always find something more amazing and someone more interesting on our phones. This undermines our interest in building community IRL.

ex. Camping in CO—a bro was on his phone the whole time—in the car, at the gas station, hiking, campfire. Finally near end of trip started engaging us and that was the best! Cards around the fire.

ex. Steve Jobs often described apple products as “magical.” We have been conditioned to think that our technology is the most amazing thing, that its magic outshines creation. But the world is *more* magical (see last *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strip³³) and the most amazing, valuable, and interesting part of all of creation is people.

2. We think we don’t **need** the people around us that much because we can always google it.

I don’t need to know the “village wise man” anymore, I can just google it. You may get a better answer but you loose something even more important—community.

Dehumanization: Technology has decreased the amount of our human interactions. ex. Self-check out, google maps rather than asking for directions, gas station attendant used to pump your gas. Online church.³⁴ Christianity—body of knowledge vs Body of Christ?

3. Updating the masses is **easier** than connecting with a few people more personally and profoundly.

We are embodied beings. But we tend to over-prioritize easy, disembodied, online interactions at the expense of more costly, in-person interactions. Online all your friends are like you or are at least liked by you so **1**) we don’t get together with the ppl around us. In a physical gathering, you are forced to interact and love people you are unlike you. We like social media because it comes without the risks and requirements of real-world community. Even when we’re together the temptation is to pull the parachute of our smartphone and to text someone we like or to scroll through instagram. So **2**) we are end up being alone together. Or **3**) when we are together we connect on a very shallow level—did you see that cat GIF? Did you see that YouTube video? We don’t take the risk of going deeper. This requires asking questions and listening. You know how the Bible describes friendship? Iron sharpening iron (Prov 27:17).

²⁹ Lee, *Life-Study of Ephesians*, Ch. 93

³⁰ Lee, *The Life for the Preaching of the High Gospel*, 54

³¹ Kerry Robichaux, “Axioms of the Trinity.” *Affirmation and Critique* 1.1 (Jan. 1996): 9-10

³² Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 142-143

³³ “It’s a magical world, Hobbes, ol’ buddy... let’s go exploring!” gocomics.com

³⁴ <https://churchofhome.org/churchofhome-global>

We're lonelier than ever—even though opportunities for social connection have exponentially increased. Social media promised to connect the world, but now 18-22 yr are the **loneliness generation**.

~1 in 5 Americans reported rarely or never feeling close to others.
2 in 5 Americans sometimes or always feel that their relationships are not meaningful.³⁵
12th graders in 2015 were going out less often than 8th graders did

Number of teens who get together with their friends nearly every day dropped by more than 40% from 2000 to 2015... fewer kids are spending time simply hanging out... All the old hang out spots have been replaced by virtual spaces accessed through apps.

We're
scrolling
alone

iGen teens have more leisure time than Gen X teens did, not less. So what are they doing with all that time? They are on their phone, in their room, alone and often distressed.

The toll of loneliness: "Loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day."

2 John 12 ...Face to face THAT our joy may be made full.

Our need: **FIMI**—frequent, in-person, meaningful, interactions—brings joy.
Eye contact one of the most powerful forms of social bonding possible.³⁶

Community isn't a group of identical people. (Acts 13:1)

ex. orchestra. To wish that all members in your community were the same as you, would destroy the beauty and power of the group. Like wanting every instrument of an orchestra to be the same. Matt 18:19—*symphoneo* (Greek), "if two of you are in harmony."

3. We are depressed

Psa. 25:16 Turn toward me, and be gracious to me, for I am alone and afflicted.

Prov. 14:30 A tranquil heart is life to the flesh, but envy is rottenness to the bones.

The YP in iGen are on "the brink of the worst mental-health crisis in decades. Much of this deterioration can be traced to their phones."³⁷

Why are we depressed?

1. Too much screen time

More screen time
= more depressed

"All screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all nonscreen activities are linked to more happiness. If you were going to give advice for a happy adolescence based on this survey, it would be straightforward: Put down the phone, turn off the laptop, and do something—anything—that does not involve a screen."

2. Comparison

"Comparison is the thief of joy." –Theodore Roosevelt

³⁵ Shainna Ali, "What You Need Know About the Loneliness Epidemic," psychologytoday.com (July 12, 2018)

³⁶ Reinke, 60

³⁷ Jean M. Twenge, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" [The Atlantic](http://theatlantic.com), theatlantic.com (Sept. 2017)

Comparison stems from FOMO. FOMO is a combination of 1) personal insecurity, 2) a lack of recognition of God's sovereignty, and 3) then passive exposure to the one-sided, carefully manicured projection of another person's life.

"Never seek what is not yours, because you'll never get it. Never seek what is yours, because no one can take it from you." –Ron Kangas

3. Sleep Deprived

Teens should get ~9 hrs of sleep / night; a teen who is getting < 7 hrs / night is significantly sleep deprived. Sleep deprivation is linked to: compromised thinking and reasoning, susceptibility to illness, weight gain, high blood pressure, depression and anxiety.

Depression makes us vulnerable to Satan's attack and drives us to seek validation. Usually this validation takes non-Christian forms and when we get validation from non-Christian friends that feels good we are at risk of developing distorted desires.

4. We develop distorted desires (disordered)

Prov. 4:23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it are the issues of life.

Rom. 12:2 Do not be fashioned according to this age but be transformed...

The desires of our heart are not taught, they are caught. That's why there's a gap between what we know and what we do. Discipleship is not just about learning the right information, but about shaping our loves. Our heart steers us—our acting agent.³⁸ And habits are heart shaping. Our habits, the things we do, do things to us. Your heart is not impermeable! We steep our hearts in the liquid of the online world for hours each day and then for a little while each week in Bible study or church. Of course we love the world more!

ex. marinating chicken for all day in teriyaki sauce but taking it out for 1 hr at in the morning. Are you surprised that it tastes like teriyaki? It has soaked so long that the juices have penetrated it.

All of this happens unconsciously.

We're often unaware of the environment we're immersed in: 2 fish swimming in water. Older fish: Morning boys, how's the water? They swim on, then one turns & says: what the heck is water?

The spirit of the age = all that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power, being the moral or immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale.

Our phone habits reveal our heart. On paper we could wright down all the correct answers to what we should love, but our phone habits tell a different story. We become like what we "like." The screen of your phone is the mirror of your heart, it makes what is in your heart visible. Imagine your heart standing behind you and you can't turn around and see it, but the mirror in front of you lets you see what is hidden behind you. "My phone screen divulges in razor-sharp pixels what my heart *really* wants."³⁹

³⁸ Lee, *Life-Study of First Thessalonians*, Ch. 21-22

³⁹ Reinke, 26-27

Ex. Beauty, fashion, fitness motivation, material wealth, success, violence, lust

“My weight is my love, wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.”⁴⁰ Love is like gravity. Our loves are formed by our habits. The age wants to shape our habits.

Focusing *only* on learning the right information about the Bible and guarding against wrong teaching but neglecting how to shape our hearts, is like guarding the front door but leaving the back wide open.

Distorted desires direct us toward different goals. If they go unchecked they will reshape our identity, lead us into a different community, and write us into a different story.

5. We don't read

Matt. 12:3 Have you not read? (Jesus asks this 6x in Matt.)

Eph. 3:3-4 By revelation the mystery was made know to me, as I have written previously in brief, by which in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ.

“Our entire faith is built on a book.”⁴¹ Christians are called people of the book.

Benefits of reading a physical Bible:⁴²

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Distraction free reading | 4. Visibility |
| 2. Better retention | 5. Immersive reading (close reading) |
| 3. Discoverability | |

“Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.”⁴³

Requires difficult, sustained, active engagement not immediate, impulsive, passive reception.
2 Pet. 3:16—“some things are hard to understand”

Practical helps

1. Notifications audit—do you really need that app's notifications on?
2. No phone 30 mins beginning & end of day
3. Turn on airplane mode when you sleep
4. Determine screen free places—dinner table, bathroom, church meetings
5. Have a phone alternative—hobbies
6. Practice being fully present to others
7. 30 day fast to develop perspective and wisdom

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* 13.9.10

⁴¹ Reinke, 79

⁴² Kyle Barton, “The Benefits of Reading a Paper Bible,” conversantfaith.com (April 27, 2015)

⁴³ Nicholas Carr, quoted in Reinke, 84-85

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3. Without God, man abuses technology for selfish and sinful purposes—Gen. 4; Rom. 1:30; Eph. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:12; 7:31

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