

God & Technology

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to Romans 12:1-2.

This morning, we're beginning a series called 'redeem the screen.' Today we're thinking about God and Technology more generally – next week, we'll dive into social media, the apps and ways that we use phones, tablets, and computers to interact socially with one another through things like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, and other mediums.

As you've heard me say before, the normal diet of our church is expository preaching, that is, messages that walk through a portion of God's Word and applies its truth to our lives. But from time to time, I think it's appropriate for us to think together about a topic in which we pull various biblical principles together and seek to use wisdom to address it. That's what we're doing these couple weeks; we're not walking through a particular passage, rather, we're talking about how to apply some biblical truths to our lives.

As we begin, I want to remind us of something basic, that is, the biblical process of change from Romans 12:1-2. I want these verses to serve as a kind of foundation for our discussion today. We are not to be conformed to the world – the things of the world are passing away. Rather, we are to be changed in our thinking and therefore learn to discern the will of God. That's what I want for us as we consider technology this morning.

Read Romans 12:1-2

12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let's pray...

What is technology?

What are some examples of technology? What comes to your mind?

"Anything invented after you were born"

My Grandpa spoke about how far farming had changed in his lifetime. His parents had taught him to farm with a horse and a plow, as farming had been done for centuries. But in his lifetime, he saw it all change to the point where vast fields are cultivated and harvested by enormous tractors guided by GPS at the push of a button.

Let me give you some stats about technology, just to remind ourselves how much our world is surrounded by it

- 90% of the world's data was generated between 2019 and the present
- There are 4.2 billion active users on social media platforms
- The typical internet user spends an average of 6 hours and 55 minutes on the internet daily
- There are nearly 15 billion mobile devices (like phones and tables) in use in 2021

*By the way, I know these things because I learned them online¹

What am I talking about when I talk about technology?

- Smartphones, tablets, computers
- TV's, video games, cameras

But technology includes more than just electronics...

- Medical technology
- Agricultural technology
- Communications
- Transportation

All of us use technology everyday. We have technology in order to make our lives safer, more convenient, more efficient, more free, more productive, and to give us more control. We use technology to help us solve problems like food, shelter, clothing, transportation, education, information, and health. ²

¹ <https://connect.comptia.org/blog/information-technology-stats-facts#:~:text=Internet%20Statistics&text=4.28%20billion%20users%20access%20the,reporting%20broadband%20access%20at%20home>

² Albert Borgmann, *Power Failure* (Brazos Press, 2003)

Kevin Vanhoozer defines technology this way, "Technology includes all tools, machines, utensils, weapons, instruments, housing, clothing, communicating and transporting devices, and the skills by which we produce and use them."

There are a couple extremes that people can take when it comes to technology. One the one hand, you could be a technophile – someone who loves technology. That isn't bad in itself. But it could be if you believed that technology was going to provide you with meaning or give you purpose. If you function as though you think technology is going to provide all of the answers to mankind's problems – that's one extreme.

The people at the other extreme those who don't like technology, at least up to a certain point. They could be called Luddites. Do you know what a Luddite is?

(show picture)



The word Luddite has come to describe someone who is opposed to new technology. Someone who doesn't want any part of new inventions or devices. The word originally described groups of people who protested the use of textile machines that put them out of work. In protest, they started fires and broke machines in order to try to retain their jobs. But in the end, they lost.

So we have technophiles on one end, and Luddites on the other. And I imagine that most of us don't find ourselves in either one of these extremes. Rather, we're somewhere in the middle. And we're probably ok with how we're doing in relation to technology. There probably aren't many of us that would admit that we aren't doing well with technology. Most of us likely think that it's not an issue for us – it's something that younger people struggle with. Or frankly, the younger people might think it's something that the older people struggle with (something they can't figure out).

It's probably like how not many people think that they are too rich or too greedy. There's always someone who is richer or greedier, so it's not a problem for me.

Well, right up front I want to challenge us to consider that we may need some help here in this area of using technology wisely. It's possible that we have blind spots, which by definition, we can't see ourselves. We need other people to help us. It's important for us as individuals and for our families to think through these things, so that we live with wisdom and do not fall into foolishness or sin.

So what I want to do with the next few moments is ask you to consider three potential temptations that come along with technology and then two redeeming uses of technology, and finally one basic truth about technology. And then I'm going to invite a couple folks up to help us think a bit more about using technology in our lives.

Three Temptations of Technology

I want to begin by suggesting three temptations that technology brings with it. These aren't the only ones, but they are some of the most common, I believe, in our culture.

The temptation of misusing time

It is important for us to use our time wisely, would you agree with that? God wants us to make wise choices about how we use the days He has entrusted to us. We see this principle applied in various texts. For example, Moses writes in Psalm 90 about how our days pass by quickly before the Lord, and so he prays in verse 12...

Psalm 90:12

So teach us to number our days
that we may get a heart of wisdom.

The wise Christian will recognize and live in light of the fact that we are limited creatures with a limited time in this life. The wise person will use his time well.

And this is where the temptation for technology comes in. Technology promises to save time, and it does so in many ways. From microwaves to airplanes, we are able to do things with much greater speed and are able to save lots of time that would have been spent in other ways in the past. But technology also brings with it greater temptations to misuse time and lead us to spend our days pursuing ends that do not ultimately matter. Many of us may find that our lives are full of activity but we are not really accomplishing all that much of eternal significance. So the warning I want to give us is this – don't let technology lead you to misuse time.

So here's a question: Are you too busy? That is a question that almost everyone in our culture struggles to answer honestly – either because we don't want to admit it or because we think it's a good thing to be too busy; we don't see a problem with it. So let me ask it this way – what takes up too much time in your life?
(I'm just asking questions here for you to think about)

Do you suffer from what's been called 'the tyranny of the urgent'? (phone notifications, emails, timers/alarms set by Alexa, rushing from one thing to the next all the time)

There are all kinds of things that demand attention right away and can gobble up our lives if we're not careful. The "urgent" things in our life become a tyrant that rules us.

Or maybe you buy into the myth of multi-tasking – studies show that people *feel* more productive when doing multiple things at once, even though they aren't really more productive *in actuality*.³ That means that we think we're really using our time well when we really aren't. And our time floats away from us, often due to trying to multi-task with using technology and doing something else at the same time.

Or maybe it's entertainment that takes up too much time. Entertainment is not bad in itself; God designed us to have a rhythm of work and rest in our lives. We can't be productive every moment of every day. But I think many of us probably spend too much time with entertainment. Let me offer three areas for you to consider:

- TV / Streaming

Is it your habit to watch something every day? Again, that might not be bad in itself, but could it be affecting your sleep or health? Are you addicted to watching the 24/7 news cycle? Do you have to constantly watch the stock market updates? Is it reality television or bingeing shows that tempts you to spend hours just consuming entertainment?

- Video Games

Could be on your phone, could be a console or PC. I think the problem is not that they're so terrible, it's that they're so good! Teams of developers study how to get you to play and how to keep you playing. They work hard to keep you playing.

- Phones

Are you addicted to your phone? How much time do you spend on your phone in a given week? If you have an iPhone, it'll track that for you. But I'll warn you, it can be pretty convicting.

³ Amy and Andy Crouch, *My Tech-Wise Life: Growing Up and Making Choices in a World of Devices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020) 22.

What if I asked you to take out your phone right now and turn it all the way off for the rest of the day? How would you react? How many times would you reach for it? (my jeans have a phone outline in the pocket...)

It sounds impossible to some people. But you know, it wasn't that long ago that people lived without being able to be constantly in touch with everyone who wanted them. (McDonald's just started accepting credit cards in 2003).

Is technology tempting you to misuse your time? How would you know? Three symptoms...

1) you aren't able to do the things God has called you to do (work hard at your job as unto the Lord – Colossians 3:23, be present with your family and friends, serve others and show hospitality)

2) you would react strongly if the technology is taken away from you (the idea of being quiet or removing your phone is scary to you...) you feel panicked if you don't have your phone or the internet is down or power goes out (like this past week...)

A third way you might know that technology is tempting you to misuse time is this –

3) you feel guilty right now...could that be an indication that you know you are misusing your time with technology? Is the Spirit stirring up something in your heart right now? Have you become enslaved to technology?

The temptation of misusing attention / energy

If the first area is the temptation to misuse time, a closely related one is misusing our attention or our energy. It may not necessarily be that you or I are spending too much time with technology, but it could be that technology is sapping us of our energy and attention in ways that are ultimately harmful.

You ever check Facebook or Twitter or whatever and it kind of ruins your day? Maybe it changes your mood, making you upset or irritable and grumpy? Maybe technology is just what you spend the bulk of your energy on.

God is concerned about how we use our energy. After speaking about the great hall of faith and the men and women in the Bible who lived by faith, the author of Hebrews writes...**Hebrews 12:1**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, *let us also lay aside every weight*, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...

In addition to laying aside sin, we are to lay aside every weight. What does that mean? It means the things are weighing you down. What's pulling your attention and energy away from important things such that you are tempted to give up?

I think another word for this is distraction. What's distracting you and sapping your energy? How easily are you distracted? How many of you have looked at a phone when you should have been paying attention?

Technology tempts us with the fear of missing out. FOMO. If I'm not giving my energy to keep up with what's happening, then I won't be a part of it. And my life will feel less important.

Simon Sinek asked a crowd once, "Do you feel important to me if I am looking at my phone right now?" It feels like I'd rather be doing something else, doesn't it?

A close cousin of distraction is procrastination. Do you find yourself consistently putting off important things because you're too tired or too busy when in reality much of your energy has just gone into mindless entertainment or social media or other technology?

Let me ask it another way, what's the opposite of distraction? I would suggest focus. Are you able to focus? Have you tried to focus on something recently? Like, really honed in on something that wasn't a screen or tech, but something in real life that would benefit from your attention? What in your life could you work on if your energy wasn't going to your phone or watching TV or playing video games or streaming a show?

Would fasting from technology occasionally, maybe an hour a day, or one night a week or one whole week a year...would that allow you to pour more time into your family? Your marriage? Your friends? Your ability to show hospitality and serve others?

Three suggestions from Andy Crouch:

1. Put away your phone with other people & turn off notifications / be present

2. Assume that you have no willpower (if it's available, assume you'll give in)
3. Trying fasting from technology (especially your phone or tablet or TV) one hour a day, one day a week, and one week a year

I dare you to try those things and see if you don't have more energy for more important things in your life.

The temptation of misusing people

One of the most harmful dangers in technology is that it can tempt us to misuse other people. By that, I mean that there is a great temptation to turn other people into mere products or tools or objects for us to use.

This shows up in two primary ways, I believe. One is the temptation to use people merely as products. When we treat people like they're only value to us is if they are giving us money or views or likes, or if they're going to help us win friends and influence people, then we are not treating them as though they are whole people – bodies and souls. We are failing to love them as our neighbor and treat them as we would want to be treated.

This can be a problem with online transactions because the internet offers the illusion of anonymity. You can seem to hide yourself and so you may say things or treat people in ways that you wouldn't dare if you were face-to-face.

God calls us to love our neighbors. Who is our neighbor? Anyone with whom we interact. That person online on the other side of the screen is your neighbor and you owe him or her love. Much more we could say on that, but I'll move on.

The other primary way that we are tempted to misuse people with technology is through sexual immorality and especially pornography. There are many problems with pornography, but one of the bigger ones is that it dehumanizes people. Men and women who bear the image of God, who are whole people (body and soul) are reduced to whatever their appearance is on a screen. Pornography turns people into objects – into tools to be used and then discarded.

The Bible repeatedly condemns sexuality immorality in strong terms...

Ephesians 5:3

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

Paul gives these words about how Timothy is to treat various groups in the church...

1 Timothy 5:2

[treat] older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Don't treat the young women as tools to be used, Timothy. Treat your sisters in Christ with purity as you would treat your earthly siblings.

The temptation of technology is to promise satisfaction, but it cannot deliver. It promises happiness, but it will not last. And what seems to be hidden will eventually be uncovered.

So what are we to do?

Romans 13:13-14

13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. **14** But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Walk in the light. Don't sneak around. Don't plan to sin when you have the opportunity. Don't make provision for the flesh. In other words, don't make it easy for yourself to sin. Use internet filters and accountability software. Have other people in your life who have the freedom to ask you pointed questions about how you're using technology.

And let me say this: Brother, sister... if you're struggling, don't try to fight this battle alone. Talk to a pastor or a trusted Christian friend who can help you. Take that step today. God is for you; you can walk in purity. Don't give in to the temptation to misuse people with technology.

Two Redeeming uses of Technology

I know this has been heavy, and I sound a bit like a Luddite right now. So I want to remind us that God is absolutely sovereign over all things, including technology and whatever the future holds. So what good is technology?

Technology can be used to exercise godly dominion

Genesis 1:28

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

We are to subdue creation and have dominion over it. We are to steward it, to tame it. We are to bring order out of chaos like God did when He formed the earth when it was dark and void.

We are to use technology to bring order out of chaos. That means that we are to create and make things beautiful and set things right that have been broken. There is a godly impulse that we have to make our homes beautiful and comfortable and peaceful. We are embodied people who experience life physically in our bodies, so things like good food and beautiful buildings are part of how we subdue creation and tame it.

So whether we cook food or work in a hospital, or if we make candles or build cars, or if we sell houses or ice rinks, or if we negotiate contracts among businesses or raise crops from the ground, or if we educate children or care for them at home, or if we repair heating and cooling or install electric outlets – all of these things and many more contribute to our calling to create and steward and make things work in harmony and beauty. Is that how you view your job?

Tony Reinke has said that technology at its best can be *adopted* into our lives so that we exercise godly dominion. But technology is used best when we *adapt* it to our purposes. We don't *adopt* it uncritically; we *adapt* it to our purpose. We set limits. We own our technology; it doesn't own us. We must learn and re-learn how to make technology help us flourish in the ways that God designed us to flourish – in our bodies, with our time and energy, in our relationships. That means we have to be thoughtful, but we can adapt technology for the glory of God.

Technology can be used to make disciples

Across the history of the church, when there are advances in technology, the Great Commission also advances.

For example, under the Roman Empire, the *Pax Romana* (or the long period of peace they enjoyed) was made possible by their military, their roads, common language, system of law enforcement, and even sanitation systems. It was their technology that provided the platform on which the early church flourished and spread throughout the world in the first centuries after Christ.

The Gutenberg printing press published Bibles which allowed many more people to have access to the Word of God and contributed to the Reformation and the recovery of the true gospel in many parts of the world. William Tyndale and Martin Luther used the printing press to spread the gospel and make disciples.

Christians have used radio and television and blogs and the internet and podcasts to spread the gospel. Our church buildings use all kinds of technology from microphones and instruments to digital projection and livestreamed services.

Think about this – God is absolutely sovereign over all technology. And he is working out His plan to show Christ as supreme over all things through the gospel message proclaimed by the church. That means that God is sovereignly allowing technology to be discovered and created ultimately, **in order to help the church proclaim the gospel.**

A couple hundred years ago, theologian Stephen Charnock observed, “As all that is good which is in plants and animals is for the good of man, so all the gifts of natural man [including technology] are for the church’s good, next to the glory of God.”⁴

Whatever Silicon Valley comes up with next, we know that technology will, in the end, bring glory to God and be used by God’s people to make disciples of all the nations.

One Basic Truth

I know that this morning has been heavy. But friends, the gospel means that we do not have to be enslaved to sin. There is hope! God the Father sent His Son Jesus so that we can be forgiven and start again today. Here’s the basic truth – *you can walk in wisdom with technology.*

⁴ Stephen Charnock *Complete Works*, 1:67-68, cited by Tony Reinke *God, Technology and the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022) 142.

I started with Romans 12:1-2. Notice how that verse begins, **Romans 12:1**
I appeal to you therefore, brothers, **by the mercies of God**, to present your bodies...

It is by the mercies of God that we are called to do these things. We all need God's mercy as we seek to use technology wisely. So what's your next step this week?

If you're caught in misusing technology in your time or attention, God can help you put those things off and take steps of growth. If you're caught in misusing people with technology – maybe hiding your sin or caught in greed or lust or consumerism, God wants to free you from that today. He does that by His mercy.

Jesus is Lord over all technology. He is not afraid of it. And He stands ready to forgive our sin and bring hope for real, lasting change. He can do that because He disarmed sin, canceled its power through His death on the Cross. And we are called to trust in Him and by faith walk in newness of life. If you've not done that, then that's the next step I would urge you to take. If you have done that, then let today be a day when you recommit yourself to use technology wisely by the mercies of God.

I'm going to pray for us and then invite Daniel Whitenack and Josh Pyper up to talk about how we can press this further into our lives.

Let's pray...

Questions to Ask

Let me recommend a couple voices that I have appreciated in this area: Andy Crouch & Tony Reinke.

Daniel

- 1. How has technology been used by the church to advance the gospel?***
- 2. What dangers do you see for people who may be tempted to avoid all technology or become too engrossed in it?***
- 3. How can we as a church or us as individuals & families wisely use technology in our walks with Christ?***

Josh

- 1. What limits would you recommend to parents for their kids?***

-time limits (being present at home, during meals, during shared experiences...)
-not missing sleep; staying up too late
-not becoming dependent on the dopamine / stimulus of screens to eliminate boredom (videos games, binging shows/movies/videos/social media, etc.)

- 2. What filters would you recommend?***

Open DNS

Covenant Eyes

Accountable2You

Circle Device

Parental Controls