

## WEEK 5 | A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF TECHNOLOGY, PT 4

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.*  
**PSALM 23:4**

We have seen God's exhaustive sovereignty over technology across the pages of Scripture. God created this universe to be discovered and utilized, encoding in creation the very laws and materials that would guide mankind's innovative progress, providing boundaries limiting man's ability to create except that which God has purposed. Further, it is God who creates the technologist and the one who uses his technology. It is God who teaches the technologist through creation. At every step, God is sovereignly guiding and directing man's technological progress so that His eternal purposes for the creation unfold according to His will.

We rightly recognize that technology is a grace God bestows on all men. Technology mitigates the effects of the fall. We still get our bread by the sweat of our brow (Genesis 3:19), but technology has made it easier. The creation still works against us, but technology has given us a greater level of mastery over it. Death is still a universal problem, but medical technology has enabled us to delay it some. There are many benefits to many of the technologies that populate our planet; certainly, there are significant dangers too, as we will address later. First, we should recognize that there are certain things no technology can do or accomplish. Recognizing these will help us live in this technological age.

### CHASING THE WIND

What the Christian needs is wisdom—skillful living in the technium. Thankfully, Scripture is not short on wisdom. The books of Job, certain Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and The Song of Solomon are pieces of wisdom literature, given to God's people to guide us in living God-honoring lives in a fallen world. While we will return to these books frequently as we address some of the specific techno-pathologies of our culture, we should take heed of Solomon's message in the book of Ecclesiastes as it relates to technology.

Solomon, the Preacher, is writing near the end of his life and reflecting on all that he has learned during his time "under the sun." If you are familiar with his backstory, you know that Solomon received unparalleled wisdom from the Lord but squandered it, pursuing a life of lust and sin (1 Kings 11:1-8). He set out to find meaning and satisfaction in this life, pursuing wealth, pleasure, and power, only to find that meaning is not found "under the sun" but in the God who created the

sun. Ecclesiastes is Solomon's appeal to us to not repeat his mistakes, to "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). He gives his thesis at the beginning:

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,  
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

"Vanity," from the Hebrew *hebel*, has the idea of "the merest of breaths." It describes something that is ephemeral, elusive, fleeting, and ultimately unsatisfying. That, Solomon says, is true of everything "under the sun" (1:2):

All things are full of weariness;  
a man cannot utter it;  
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,  
nor the ear filled with hearing (1:8).

Nothing in this world will satisfy; nothing in this world will give us purpose; nothing in this world will fulfill our longing for the transcendent, for God "has put eternity into man's heart, yet so he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (3:11). This is a universal truth, and it applies to technology.

Modern society—like societies at all times, really—has placed great hope in the ability of technology to make us happy. Despite this, the reality is the exact opposite: people are more unhappy than they have been in decades. Much of this unhappiness has been linked to the technologies that have come to play dominant roles in our lives. The very things that were meant to make us happy have depressed us. Solomon would not have been surprised, and we should not be either. Technology cannot save and it cannot satisfy. Technology will not make us happy.

## TRUSTING IN CHARIOTS

Technology won't make us happy, and we should not expect it to do so. Technology was never meant to be the foundation upon which we place our hope and trust. We also need not fear technology, despite the evil potential it often harbors. We must go beyond technology to the One who controls it. That is the message of Psalm 20. In light of God's gracious providence, the Christian can place their faith in God no matter what technologies surround them. Psalm 20 reads:

<sup>1</sup> May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!  
May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!  
<sup>2</sup> May he send you help from the sanctuary  
and give you support from Zion!

<sup>3</sup> May he remember all your offerings  
 and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! *Selah*  
<sup>4</sup> May he grant you your heart's desire  
 and fulfill all your plans!  
<sup>5</sup> May we shout for joy over your salvation,  
 and in the name of our God set up our banners!  
 May the LORD fulfill all your petitions!  
<sup>6</sup> Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed;  
 he will answer him from his holy heaven  
 with the saving might of his right hand.  
<sup>7</sup> Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
 but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.  
<sup>8</sup> They collapse and fall,  
 but we rise and stand upright.  
<sup>9</sup> O LORD, save the king!  
 May he answer us when we call.

Psalm 20 is a Psalm of worship on the eve of battle. David and his warriors are armed for war. Before they leave, they gather with God's people at the temple to publicly seek God's aid and favor.

David, we should remember, is well acquainted with the benefits of superior technology. His ranged sling overcame the might of Goliath. By this time, David is a skilled warrior, well-versed in the arts of war and no doubt outfitted with the finest armor and weaponry available. You can think of him as the ancient Israeli version of a special forces operator.

One can only imagine the confidence a warrior-king like David would have geared up and at the head of a powerful fighting force. It would be natural for some to "trust in chariots and some in horses." In other words, there are some who trust in their technology. Chariots were the pinnacle of military technology in the ancient near east. They provided superior speed, powerful armor, and the ability to use ranged weaponry while on the move. A well-coordinated corps of horses or chariots could easily flank foot soldiers and provided a devastating edge in battle. They were so effective that many armies centered their unit allocation and tactics around their cavalry. As one so familiar with war and military strategy, David would have been familiar with the power that a strong cavalry provided.

In spite of this, David recognizes the folly of trusting in technology. Those who trust in their chariots and horses "collapse and fall." Why? Because no technology, no matter how powerful, can compare with Yahweh. Those who trust in God "rise and stand upright" because the sovereign Lord of the universe is on their side. As we have seen, God is absolutely sovereign over technology—when and where it is developed, who creates it, who uses it, what it is used for, and to what extent it accomplishes the aims for which it was developed. Reinke writes,

The world wears the false confidence of wealth, power, and military might. Society walks with the unnatural swagger of self-sufficiency: “Nothing is impossible for us!” Not so with God’s people. Our supreme confidence is in God. Carnal self-confidence ignores God. Trust in God alone is the death of vain self-confidence, the collapse of contrived tech-confidence. So the psalmist, in the face of war, urges us to cast off every confidence that hinders us from placing our exclusive trust in God.<sup>1</sup>

God’s sovereignty over technology means that no tech can ever be used to thwart God’s purposes (remember the Tower of Babel and all that pitch?). Just as a king’s heart is “a stream of water in the hand of Yahweh” that He turns “wherever he will” (Proverbs 21:1), so all the technology produced and used by kings—and, by extension, anyone—flows in that stream. It would be foolish to place our hope and trust in technology instead of the One who stands behind all tech. Like David, we must recognize that it is Yahweh who answers in the day of trouble (vs. 1), sends us help in time of need (vs. 2), and meets our deepest desires (vs. 4). Yahweh alone can save (vs. 5, 6, 9). Part of using technology wisely is recognizing what it cannot do. Technology cannot save us. Though technology mitigates some of the effects of the fall, technology cannot and will not rescue us from sin and death.

## ESCAPE VELOCITY

The modern immortalist movement demonstrates the hope our world has placed in technology. Immortalists believe that scientific and technological advances will eventually enable us to not just slow down, but halt or reverse the effects of aging. In a lengthy article in the April 2017 edition of *The New Yorker*, journalist Tad Friend chronicles the growing movement in Silicon Valley to overcome the inexorable approach of death. The sharpest minds, dozens of tech startups, billions of dollars, and countless hours of research are being directed toward this singular problem. “Aging,” Friend writes, “is the creeping and then catastrophic dysfunction of everything, all at once. Our mitochondria sputter, our endocrine system sags, our DNA snaps. Our sight and hearing and strength diminish, our arteries clog, our brains fog, and we falter, seize, and fail.”<sup>2</sup> Solomon would have agreed, though he was a bit more poetic, describing “the evil days” when

the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—they are afraid also of what is

---

<sup>1</sup> Reinke, *God, Technology, and the Christian Life*, 161.

<sup>2</sup> Tad Friend, “Silicon Valley’s Quest to Live Forever,” in *The New Yorker*, April 3, 2017.

high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.  
– Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

Many in the anti-aging community—Friend dubs them healthspanners—want to “give us a healthier life followed by ‘compressed morbidity’—a quick and painless death.”<sup>3</sup> They view death as inevitable but believe that medicine and technology can give mankind more control over when death comes and how disastrous it will be.

The consensus among immortalists, however, is that aging and death are essentially technical problems. Health technology has become information technology. Our genome is akin to computer code, they theorize, which can be edited and rewritten according to our desires. The rise in gene-therapy technology and epigenetics leads many to believe that the days of genetic manipulation are not far off. If we can only identify and correct the genetic processes that lead to aging, then in theory we can halt or reverse the process altogether. Thus, “Death would no longer be a metaphysical problem, merely a technical one.”<sup>4</sup>

Other immortalists point to the advent of AI as humanity’s salvation from death. Ray Kurzweil, a director at Google and committed futurist, has popularized the idea that “humans will merge with A.I. and transcend our biological limitations,” which he calls the Singularity. Nanobots will connect our brains to a neocortical annex in the cloud, producing a billion-fold expansion of our intelligence. “For a time, we’ll be a hybrid of biological and nonbiological thinking, but, as the cloud keeps doubling, the nonbiological intelligence will predominate, and it will be anachronistic, then, to have one body.”<sup>5</sup> At this point the singularity occurs, and we will be god-like. This is, after all, the great pursuit of man: to “be like god” (Genesis 3:5).

If aging is like gravity, inexorably pulling us down towards death, the hope is that technology will eventually enable us to build an anti-aging rocket with enough thrust that we will reach “longevity escape velocity,” the point at which the force produced by the rocket exceeds the force of gravity so that we can escape its pull forever. Aging and death, then, would be a thing of the past.

Why this obsession? One unnamed scientist chalks it up to “the frustration of many successful rich people that life is too short: ‘We have all this money, but we only get to live a normal life

---

<sup>3</sup> Friend, “Silicon Valley’s Quest to Live Forever,” 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Friend, “Silicon Valley’s Quest to Live Forever,” 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Ray Kurzweil, quoted in Friend, “Silicon Valley’s Quest to Live Forever,” 2017.

span.” This is probably true, but too simplistic. I think a deeper pathology can be discerned. “Death,” Kurzweil says, “is a great robber of meaning. It robs us of love. It is a complete loss of ourselves. It is a tragedy.”<sup>6</sup> Again, Solomon the wise philosopher would be found nodding his head in agreement. Time and again, it is death that foils Solomon’s search for meaning in this life (Ecclesiastes 2:21; 3:19; 5:15; 6:1-6; 9:2).

Despite the veneer of optimism and hope, many immortalists recognize that they are laboring at a Sisyphean task. For all the money and research that have been poured into this quest for longevity and immortality, the primary products have been new questions and unknowns:

A great many longevity papers end with mystified hand-waving in the direction of unknown “systemic factors.” Solving aging is not just a whodunnit but a howdunnit and wheredunnit and a whyohwhydunnit. Tom Rando suggested, “It’s not A causes B causes C causes D causes aging. It’s a network diagram of nodes and links—all subject to feedback loops where consequences become causes—that gradually becomes more and more destabilized.” If the body is a set of Christmas-tree lights—and it’s not—then every time you plug it into a new outlet some lights go on and some go off. Stabilizing one part of the network further destabilizes another. That which makes us also unmakes us, and the process of living seems inextricably bound to the process of dying.<sup>7</sup>

That last sentence is profound in its theology. “That which makes us also unmakes us, and the process of living seems inextricably bound to the process of dying.” Indeed, death is an inescapable part of life. Since Genesis 3, death has reigned over all life (Romans 5:14). Moses expresses this reign of terror with a painful refrain that marks the genealogy of Genesis 5: “and he died.” Life and death—two events inextricably bound together by the curse of sin.

There is a man who has conquered death. What the tech gurus of Silicon Valley desire has already been accomplished—not through science but sacrifice. The Son of God became incarnate, taking on human flesh and living a life of righteousness by obeying the will of His Father at every turn, overcoming all temptation, and going to cross where he would provide the necessary sacrifice for sin. To redeem humanity from the jaws of death, the Son became human, “flesh and blood. . . that through death he might destroy the one who has the power over death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Death’s reign of terror has passed; a new day has dawned. As Paul writes, “For if, by one man’s trespass, death reigned through one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17). For those in Jesus Christ, death is not the final word. They have eternal life.

---

<sup>6</sup> Kurzweil, quoted in Friend, “Silicon Valley’s Quest to Live Forever,” 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Friend, “Silicon Valley’s Quest to Live Forever,” 2017.