Objective: To help people know the Biblical wisdom that helps us live faithful and healthy lives in our digital world.

Next Sunday – New Sermon Series: **'Proud of Marriage'**
While the world celebrates *'Pride Month'*, we will celebrate marriage – that we are **'Proud of Marriage'**.
The series will run through the month of June – 5 sermons.

Opening Prayer

Excluding Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday – we've taken the past 12 Sundays to consider how we as followers of Christ should live in a culture that is moving away from truth and Biblical morality – and embracing things that are not only false, but harmful and dysfunctional.
Our culture calls evil, good – and what is good, evil.
The Apostle Peter wrote that we are <u>"aliens and strangers"</u> in this world – since heaven is our true home, and he told us to stay away from <u>"fleshly lusts"</u> and to make sure we're living in ways that demonstrate the goodness of God.

> **1 Peter 2:11-12a**
> <u>"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles..."</u>

We've covered a lot of territory over these 12 Sundays. Today we conclude the series – with a topic that seems tame in comparison.

Technology and the digital world don't grab the headlines or challenge our moral compass like most of the other topics we've discussed.

But our topic today: 'Living in a Digital World' – might be the most covert and dangerous given the damage it has already caused.

In fact, I believe the digital age - has done more to transform our culture – and most Christians – than the trans movement, or abortion, or euthanasia, or nature worship combined.

In history, technology has often been one of the driving and transforming forces which propelled the next 'age' of history. Consider the printing press and the Enlightenment or Renaissance Age (1400 A.D. – 1750 A.D.), the combustion engine which ushered in the Industrial Age (1750 A.D. – 1950), the computer and the Information Age (1950 A.D. – 2000 A.D.), and we are now in the Digital Age (2000 A.D. to present) which was ushered in by the internet and the invention of the smart phone.

In each of these ages, technological advancements played a key role in the new age.

Disclaimer: This topic (The Digital World) is so huge – it covers so many things – that there is no way I can cover every specific aspect in our time today.

Not only am I unqualified to speak with any authority on some of the specific topics like AI (Artificial Intelligence) or on

specific AI applied technologies like ChatGPT – which uses AI technology to mimic human engagement and tasks – but technology changes and advances so quickly, that if I focused on the specific technologies, whatever I say today will be outdated by next year.

So, instead of getting into the specifics of various applications of technology, I'm going to focus on 2 things.

So, my goal today is 2-fold:
- To make sure we know the danger of our digital world.
- To make sure we know what the Bible offers as safeguards for us and our family.

The _unseen_ dangers of our digital world.

When you think of technology – AI – robots and the like...do you think of 'The Jetsons' – or does your mind go to 'The Terminator'?
The truth is technology is not good – and it's not evil.
Technology is **amoral** – meaning – it is morally neutral. Throughout history, advancements in technology have improved human life and benefited humanity in so many ways.
From the wheel – to the printing press – the combustion engine – air flight – fertilizers and farming technology – electricity – medicines – x-ray machines and MRI's –

air conditioning – radio – TV – computers – smart phones.

All of these things have been used for so much good. But...they have also been used for evil.

It's not the technology that is good – or evil.
It is the user of the technology – us.

Matthew 15:11
<u>"Hear and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person."</u>

Jeremiah 17:9
<u>"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"</u>

We are the ones with moral and immoral tendencies.
This is important because we need to pinpoint what the evil actually is.

Your phone, tablet – or the internet – is not evil – or good.
It's what you do with these things that makes them a tool for good or evil.

> *With the internet - you can watch online porn –*
> *or a livestream of our church service.*

For our purposes today – we want to understand what the unseen dangers of the digital world are.
Only then can we avoid the dangers – minimize our exposure to the dangers.

Today, I want to focus on screen time.

Numerous studies have shown that too much screen time is detrimental – especially for kids and teens.

Quote from an NBC News story:

> "What people need to remember is the more time that kids are on screen, that means there's less time that they're getting a lot of things that we know are incredibly important for child development, including interaction with adults, sleep, opportunities to read and conversations that are more interactive with nonverbal cues…"

(https://www.nbcnews.com/health/kids-health/negative-effects-screen-time-kids-rcna61316)

Another article – on Time.com – studied the amount of screen time for adults – and how much was detrimental.

> "COVID-19 pandemic shifted our lives in myriad ways, including the amount of time we spent glued to our devices. Research published in 2021 found that Americans in their early twenties used their phones an average of 28.5 hours per week in 2020—up from 25.9 hours per week in 2018. One review of studies conducted in 2020 and 2021 put the estimates even higher, finding that average screen time for adults in the U.S. and other countries increased 60–80% from before the pandemic."

> "Excessive screen time has been shown to have negative effects on children and adolescents. It's been linked to psychological problems, such as higher rates of depression

and anxiety, as well as health issues like poor sleep and higher rates of obesity. Many researchers believe that excessive screen use may not be as damaging to adults, but the impact hasn't been studied as extensively. Recent research has found that it can still have damaging consequences, such as digital eye strain, impaired sleep, and worsened mental health."

According to Mayo Clinic – too much screen time for kids is linked to obesity, irregular sleep patterns, behavioral problems, impaired academic performance, and violence.

Harvard Medical School has a report that discusses how screen time can interfere with sleep – a crucial brain function – and this can lead to a decline in creativity.

The Cleveland Clinic reports that younger kids – preschoolers – suffer more harm with too much screen time.

There are all sorts of reports that link extended screen time with depression – in kids and adults – with kids being the most vulnerable to suffering depression when

the phone, tablet, or TV are used to keep them quiet or keep them occupied.

There is a documentary on Netflix, "The Social Dilemma". *(Not Christian – but helpful)*
In that documentary, Jonathan Haidt, PhD (show pic) – NYU Stern School of Business, Social Psychologist, says:

"There has been a gigantic increase in depression and anxiety for American teenagers which began right around between 2011 and 2013.

The number of teenage girls (show chart) out of 100,000 in this country who were admitted to a hospital every year because they cut themselves or otherwise harmed themselves - that number was pretty stable until around 2010 or 2011 and then it begins going way up.

It's up 62% for older teen girls.

It's up 189% for the preteen girls... nearly triple!

Even more horrifying, we see the same pattern with suicide.

(show chart)

The older teen girls...15-19 yrs. old, they're up 70% compared to 2000-2010 time period.

The preteen girls are up 151% *and that pattern points to social media*.

Gen Z... the kids born after 1996 or so... those kids are the first generation in history that got onto social media in Middle School.

The generation as a whole is more anxious, fragile, and depressed.

They are much less comfortable taking risks.

The rates at which they get driver's licenses have been dropping.

The number who have ever gone out on a date or had any kind of romantic interaction is dropping rapidly."

("The Social Dilemma", documentary, Netflix, 40:05 mark)

Former Facebook and Pinterest exec Tim Kendall says, "These services are killing people...and causing people to kill themselves." ("The Social Dilemma", documentary, Netflix, 42:30 mark)

(https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2737909)
(https://bmcpsychology.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40359-023-01166-7)

This doesn't even begin to cover the algorithms that social media companies use to keep you scrolling

(Facebook, X, Instagram, Snapchat, and others).

This doesn't cover the isolation digital media produces in each user. We try to increase how many 'friends' or 'followers' we have – but none of them are truly friends or followers in a meaningful way – unless you are able to spend time with them face-to-face.

This doesn't cover how the creators of social media apps have designed these apps to captivate you with the

power of addiction – tapping into deep psychological triggers in each of us – so we spend more and more time on their apps – which gives them more and more opportunity to put ads in front of us – which is one of the prime ways they make money.

Tristan Harris – Former Design Ethicist at Google – and Co-Founder of the Center for Humane Technology – says this about the intentionality in the design of social media to make technology more persuasive.

"People can't tell what is true.
We never said any of that stuff when bicycles were invented.
If something is a tool, it genuinely is just sitting there, waiting patiently.
If something is not a tool, it's demanding things from you. It's seducing you. It's manipulating you. It wants things from you.
And we've moved away from having a tools-based technology environment to an addiction and manipulation-based technology environment.
That's what's changed.
Social media isn't a tool that's just waiting to be used.
It has its own goals, and it has its own means of pursuing them by using your psychology against you."

("The Social Dilemma", documentary, Netflix, 29:52 mark)

Technology is usually intended to make life easier – to make things more convenient or efficient.
But social media is not that kind of technology.
It's not created to help us.
It's created to use us.

We first see technology in the Bible in **Genesis 9** – when Noah builds the ark.
The next time we see technology is in **Genesis 11:1-9** –
The Tower of Babel.
This account reveals the evil use of technology.

"Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves..." (11:4)

It's not the tower that is wrong – it's the motive – to "make a name for ourselves".
Self-glorification.
We're supposed to glorify God – but we glorify ourselves.
Not for all **– but for many**, this is what social media has evolved into – a way to showcase our best moments – our best images.
A way to attract more 'friends' or 'followers'.
A way to boost our 'fame' or to be an 'influencer'.

All right – that's enough of the hidden – and not so hidden dangers of our digital world.

Let's shift gears...

Biblical _wisdom_ we can _apply_ to our digital world.

The release of the iPhone in 2007 and the subsequent smartphone market – along with tablets – transformed and revolutionized how we live life.
We now have abundant research showing undeniable trends from the data.
Now that we have the data – now that we can read the studies – we realize there are some problems.
But there are some answers.

You might be thinking, _'We should have done things differently with our kids.'_
I also look back and have regrets as to what we did / didn't do with our kids and their phones.
But we can't turn back the clock – and it's not healthy or helpful to live today carrying all of our regret and guilt about what we did / didn't do in the past.

Chinese Proverb:
'The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago.
The 2nd best time to plant a tree is today.'

With that said – let's look forward – and move forward – and see what wisdom the Bible has for living with wisdom in our digital world.

There are 3 reactions / options Christians have when they realize the hidden dangers we've discussed.

1. *Reject* or *retreat* from digital technology.

Live a total analog life!

This is not a realistic option for most believers.

It also treats technology as the evil – instead of how we use it.

Jesus prayed to the Father in **John 17:15-18**

"I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

The digital age is not going away.

French sociologist Jacques Ellul, whose book set the foundation for much Christian thought on this topic - discussed how we simply don't have a choice between the non-technical and technical means. Our world is increasingly mediated and managed by technology...that's the reality.

As followers of Christ, we need to stay engaged with the culture – to live and be present where the culture is present – which is on-line and using social media. *Our mission is to be a light for the gospel in those places.*

Living a monastic life when it comes to the digital age is not a viable option for us - *if* we are trying to live with a missional focus and incarnational living in an unbelieving world.

2. *Receive* without *reservation* digital technology.

Another option is to ignore any of the dangers and engage in the digital world like most of the world does.

Another option under this heading is to assume or presume that in the power of the Spirit in us we will be immune from the dangers – or God will protect us from the dangers.

The problem with this view is it's foolish.

God has given us wisdom to apply in life to help us navigate the many dangers and difficulties of life.

God's power is real – and we do have His Spirit indwelling in us – but His Spirit guides us by the wisdom and Word of God – not normally through supernatural or miraculous shielding power.

3. *Redeem* digital technology.

This is the gospel centered option which applies the wisdom of God and His Word to how we use and engage with the digital world.

Like we redeem all other things in this world that can be used for sinful living and evil choices, we

must also redeem our use of the internet, phones, and social media – AI and all it's current and future forms – for the Kingdom of God and the good uses these technologies can be used to accomplish.

Proverbs 1:20-23, 32-33
Wisdom shouts in the streets. She cries out in the public square.
She calls to the crowds along the main street, to those gathered in front of the city gate:
"How long, you simpletons, will you insist on being simpleminded? How long will you mockers relish your mocking? How long will you fools hate knowledge?
Come and listen to my counsel. I'll share my heart with you and make you wise.

For simpletons turn away from me—to death.
Fools are destroyed by their own complacency.
But all who listen to me will live in peace, untroubled by fear of harm."

We need to know and apply the truth of God – and the wisdom of God – to all areas of our life – including how we engage in the digital world.

The digital world does not delete God's _sovereignty_ or _providence_.

No matter what happens – nothing will take God off of His throne.
He will accomplish His purposes – according to His plan.

Isaiah 46:9-10
"I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose...'"

We see the same truth stated in the N.T.

Ephesians 1:11
"In Him (Christ) we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will..."

We need to be confident – and comforted – that whatever AI advancement – whatever impact social media has on the culture – God was...is...and will be in control and He will use all things for His glory.

Digital technology will not _replace_ humanity.

AI and future advancements in technology may come pretty close – really close to mimicking and copying what people look like and how they act – but mankind will never duplicate the wonder of God's creation in each of us.

We are made in the image of God. **Genesis 1:27**

Genesis 1:27
"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

We were brought to life with the breath of God.

Genesis 2:7

> "...then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."

We are the crowning jewel of His creation. **Psalm 8**
We are more than biological creatures – we are also spiritual creatures – which is not something that can be digitally created.

> **Psalm 8:5-6**
> "Yet You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.
> You have given him dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet..."

What we need to fear is not technology – but, according to what Jesus said in **Matthew 10:28** – we need to fear the one who can kill the soul – the Devil and his demonic forces.

> **Matthew 10:28**
> "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

The *Bible* is the *standard* for truth, not what's on a screen.

Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher said:
> *"Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right."*

This is so true in today's world.
Blatant lies are easy to flag.
It's the lies clouded with truth – that we must be aware of.

Each follower of Christ needs to be deeply rooted in the truth of the Bible.
We need to have a strong, Biblical Worldview – in order to discern what we are reading, watching, or hearing.

This requires you to study God's Word.
Meditate on it and memorize it.
Ask questions of wise and discerning Christians.
Make sure the voices you're listening to are voices of Godly wisdom and truth. (9 passages on discernment)

Proverbs 3:5-6
"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths."

Philippians 1:9-10
"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ..."

1 Corinthians 2:14-15a
"The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.
The spiritual person judges all things..."

1 John 4:1-2
"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.
By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God..."

Hebrews 5:14
"But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."

Romans 12:2
"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."

James 1:5
"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."

John 7:24
"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

Matthew 10:16
"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

Apply it...

First... We have provided a number of resources for you to consider – they are available on the tables as you leave the sanctuary – and they are at the end of my manuscript – which will be uploaded to the website and app on Tuesday.

1. Limit screen time – for yourself and your kids / grandkids.

There is no debating what we have learned over the past 17 years – that excessive screen time is dangerous – very harmful.
What is 'excessive'?
I think it's different for each person – so you need to apply wisdom – and error on the side of caution here.
But each of us has to limit the amount of screen time and make sure we're not letting our phone or technology dictate our life.

2. Prioritize people – not social media friends or followers.

There is a real danger that we will think we're connected – part of the 'online community' – but those misnamed labels are false.

There is no real connection or community online or through social media.

At least not compared to in-person interaction.

In-person interaction takes work – patience – listening – paying attention to non-verbal cues – sacrifice – and many other things that on-line interaction never requires.

People – in-person flesh and blood people are more important than anything on your screen.

If you struggle with this – that's probably a good sign you have a problem with your addiction / craving social media interaction.

3. Create a philosophy (policy?) for your family's use of technology.

This sounds very formal – but it is important to talk about this with your spouse – and with your kids.

Watch "The Social Dilemma" with your older kids – and talk about it.

Help them understand the hidden dangers – so they will start applying wisdom in their own life.

Dads: lead your family in this – and protect your family by creating some guidelines / rules for how tech will be used in your home.

Closing prayer

Resources:
Netflix special documentary: The Social Dilemma (1:34)
Jaques Ellul (1912-1994) – French philosopher, theologian, and social scientist – wrote, "The Technological Society"
Alan Noble – "You Are Not Your Own"
Samuel James – "Digital Liturgies"
Andy Crouch – "The Tech-Wise Family"
Kid's book: "Polly & the Screen Time Overload" by Betsy Childs Howard
Tony Reinke books:
 "God, Technology, and the Christian Life"
 "12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You"
 "Competing Spectacles"
Google – Family Link App – *parental control app on multiple devices.*

Articles on The Gospel Coalition website:
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/need-theology-technology/
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/christians-fear-ai/
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/digital-revolution-reformation/
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/is-technology-neutral/
https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/god-sovereign-silicon-valley/