

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Making Your Phone a Blessing, Not a Curse

[*On the screen: Image of teenage boy holding 1980's mobile phone*]

I'm curious. How many of you guys know who this is? Don't say it. Don't say it. If you're here and a millennial and want to feel very old, watch this. [*Video of old tv show plays.*] How many of you have no idea who that is? Raise your hand. Okay. And so, millennials, tell them who that is. [*crowd responds*] Right. Zach Morris from *Saved by the Bell*. And that is Zach's brick phone. Zach was the coolest guy in school for many reasons but one of them was because he was the only kid in his high school with a phone.

Saved by the Bell was my favorite show. I watched every episode. I can remember sitting there thinking what I could do if I had that phone - like all of the endless possibilities, if I had that phone. What happened is my brother actually got that phone. He was an early adopter. He had the brick phone. And so the first thing that I did when he let me borrow it is I skipped school. I had a friend, a female friend with pretty handwriting, write a "note from my mom." (I'm saying in air quotes.) And it just said, "Jonathan wasn't feeling well this morning. If he gets worse, he has our permission to go home. If you need to call me, here's my number." And that number was my brother's brick phone number. I had another female friend holding that phone, pretending to be my mom. It was a flawless plan. There was no way I was getting caught, except for when I gave the note to Miss Kenny, the attendance woman. She compared it to my other notes and I got busted.

So this is a great example of technology. You can use it for good or you can use it for bad. As soon as I got access to that phone, I used it for bad, right? This is how this works. It can be a blessing or a curse. But that phone. Do you know all of the things that phone could do? Do you know all of the capabilities that phone could do? It could just make calls. No apps. No text message. You didn't even know who was calling you. The only way you could find out who was calling you is to answer and say, "Who is this?" No caller ID. Like that's all that it could do. And still I found a way to use it for bad.

So that's what I want to talk about today. This idea that technology can be a blessing or it can be a curse. And really, I want to help you make your phone a blessing and not a curse. [*holding up his phone*] Because these things go with us everywhere now. I know that the teacher back then said, "Hey, you're not always going to have a calculator with you." And they were right, because we've got a calculator and a supercomputer and the World Wide Web with us at all times. A gateway to all kinds of evil at any given moment. And if you're a parent, you especially need to know the ramifications for this.

Yesterday, I was excited to have breakfast with Weston. We were out of town and he was traveling with me. We stayed at a hotel with a waffle bar. He loves that. He got up to go get his waffle. And I sat down with my phone just to check and saw I had a bunch of text

messages - kinda started going through those. I looked up and he was done with his waffle. Breakfast had come and gone, and I had spent the entire time on my phone. I don't think we realize the implications of what that's going to do to our kids.

In fact, the American Psychological Association put out some stats. I'll read them to you. Between 2005 and 2017, depression reported in adolescents aged 12 to 17 rose 52%. Those adolescents are 19 to 24 today. In young adults, 18 to 25, depression rose 63%. Those young adults are 25 to 32 today. The CDC said between 2000 and 2018 suicide rates in the United States increased by 37%.

Why? Why? What's happening? More than 20 percent of adults have reported having mental illness. The American Psychological Association said teens with the highest social media use rated their overall mental health the poorest, while teens with the lowest use rated their overall mental health the highest. Additionally, 10 percent of the highest use group expressed suicidal intent or self-harm in the past 12 months. Lifeway Research discovered that individuals who read or who spend an hour a day studying the Bible spend an average of two and a half hours on social media.

Speaking of health, I woke up at 2:30 this morning with the stomach bug. And so if I don't have the color in my skin right now, or if I have to stop for a second, that's why. Our amazing team came up here at 6 a.m. to record this message. I will say that I am struggling. So pray for your boy. It feels like the enemy does not want you guys to hear this message but it needs to be out.

This week I met with someone addicted to alcohol. I met with someone addicted to nicotine. I met with someone addicted to THC. I met with someone addicted to pornography. And all of us were addicted to our phones. This series is born out of my own struggle. My name is Jonathan Pokluda and I am a believer in Christ who is addicted to my phone.

I've got accountability in place. I'm working through it. The reality is - so are most of you. But that doesn't let me off the hook. It just means we're all in this together, and we've got to figure out what to do. I have met with pastor after pastor. I've met with our friends at ARO who are experts on this, studying it very closely, and we collectively believe this is among the greatest dangers to believers. The greatest danger to the Church today. This is what is hindering our thriving relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you're a guest with us today, it's always my preference to teach the scripture to read a passage to explain it and illustrate it. Today's gonna look different. I'm going to teach two ideas out of the Bible for the first half of the message, and then in the second half of the message I'll give you five points to make your technology, specifically your phone, a blessing and not a curse.

There's a clear and obvious rhythm in the scripture. There's a clear and obvious rhythm in the Bible. And it's this - God blesses his people and then his people use those blessings to make false gods or idols, or use those blessings to have others worship them. Okay. God blesses his people. We take the blessings. We use those blessings to make false gods or to have other people worship us. A great example of this, and there are many, is in Exodus 32. Moses is up on Mount Sinai and the Israelites get tired of waiting for him. And so Aaron takes all of

their gold and melts it down and makes a golden calf and they worship it. And then this is what they said: **“These are your gods, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt.”** *Exodus 32:4*. God had set them free from slavery to the Egyptians. They're wandering in the desert and they're frustrated and impatient. So, they make fake gods to worship. But here's my question for you. Where in the world did a bunch of slaves get millions and millions and millions of dollars in gold? Have you ever wondered about this? *Exodus 12* says this: (This is when they're in slavery, being set free.) **“The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.”** *Exodus 12:35-36* Okay. Quick recap. They're in slavery. God sets them free. On their way-out God gives them millions of dollars in gold. They get tired of waiting on God. And so, they take the gold that He gave them, and they make false gods, and they worship them, and they credit those false gods for the work that the one true God did.

This is the rhythm that you see in scripture. It starts in Genesis Chapter Three with the fall and sin. And then we know the whole world goes corrupt and God destroys the world by a flood. Noah builds an ark. This is an example of technology - one of the first examples of technology in the scripture. Let me read to you how technology is defined. This is from *Merriam Webster Dictionary*: “TECHNOLOGY: The practical application of knowledge, especially in a particular area such as engineering.” Okay. So now we know that technology is something that man created with gifts from God. It can be used for good, and it can be used for bad. C. S. Lewis said, and I'll paraphrase, “However great something's potential for good is, equally great is its potential for evil.” And technology is no exception to that. If that's the definition of technology, what's one of the very first examples of technology? The wheel. The wheel would be one of the first examples of technology.

What you see in the scripture from the beginning is this: **“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.’”** *Genesis 1:28a* In Genesis Chapter 7, after Noah gets off the ark, He repeats this command: **“Then God blessed Noah and His sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth... As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.’”** *Genesis 9:1, 7* But in Genesis Chapter 11, you're going to see the use of technology gone wrong. It says: **“Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, ‘Come. Let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.”** This is the invention of bricks right here. We're seeing it. **“Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.’”** *Genesis 11:1-4*

God tells them to fill the earth. They say, nah, let's stay here. They invent bricks and they use the bricks to make a tower so that they can make a name for themselves. This is what we do, guys. We take something that's meant to be a blessing and we use it as a curse on our lives and a curse on our families and a curse on our children. And this is the best example of that today. [*holding up cell phone*] And so I want to help you make technology a blessing again. I'm going to give you five things to do. So, the first thing you're going to do is “build boundaries”.

1. BUILD BOUNDARIES

As you think about boundaries or limits, like in your car, there are speed limits and there are off limits. On your phone, there are TIME limits and there are OFF limits. Time limits are the times that you need to be off your phone. And the easy ones are meal time. If you go out to a restaurant, leave your phone in the car. If the family sits down for a meal, have a drawer where everybody puts their phone in, okay? This is something that we are starting to implement in our family. There have to be those time limitations. You have apps. You can set boundaries on your phone. You can set how many hours you want to be on your phone. You can have it turn off at a certain time.

So, there are time limits and there are off limits. The OFF limits are clear. This phone is a gateway to all kinds of evil in your pocket. There's pornography, there's gambling, there's greed, materialism, comparison. Lots of sin can happen on your phone. There are places on your phone that you must not go. I've said this many times. I have the same conversation right here in front of this stage often. Somebody comes up after the service. They know my story. They know my past of pornography addiction and my journey of recovery through that. And they'll say, "Hey man, pastor, my story is just like yours." And I'm like, "what do you mean?" "I'm struggling." I'm like, "What are you struggling with?" They can't say the word, typically. I'm like, "You got to say it. You got to say it - so the enemy loses his grip." And they say, "I'm struggling with pornography." Then I say "Hey, let me ask you a question. How do you access pornography?" To which they say "my phone." To which I say, "Where's your phone?" To which they say "In my pocket." To which I say, "I thought you said you were struggling." They say, "I am." I say, "No, you're not. You're not struggling. You're carrying it around with you everywhere you go." "Man, what do you want me to do? Get rid of my phone?" "Yes, of course. Of course! Or get accountability software or something, right?" "Say, man, that just seems legalistic."

Let me read to you the words of Jesus. Matthew Chapter 5: **"I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."** *Matthew 5:28-30* And if you have a problem with Jesus's words, I promise you the problem is not Jesus. The problem is with you. And yeah, he's speaking in hyperbole, talking about the hand and the eye, but at least lose your phone or brick your phone or get a brick phone. Do something! And that leads me to my second point, "remove distractions".

2. REMOVE DISTRACTIONS

This can be apps that you don't use. This can be temptations. You want to make it really difficult for yourself to sin through this device. And so, you understand if that's you and there's something that you need to do. And so, remove distractions, remove the noise. Listen, January 1st, a new year. It's a great time to unsubscribe to a bunch of emailers. It's a great time to go in your phone and delete all the apps that you don't use. Or maybe you use

them but they're just a total waste of time. Maybe in this time as we're fasting from technology, you need to just decide – “Hey, I'm not going to play that game anymore. I don't care. I've spent too many hours there.” “I'm going to delete that social media. I'm not using it for good. I'm not using it to further the kingdom. I would be a better Christian without it.” And so, remove those distractions.

But there has to be time then when you're sitting down and, as I said in “build boundaries,” that you *remove your phone*. Speaking of distraction, there's my alarm. *[phone jingles]* Okay. And so there has to be time where you have to remove your phone from the situation, right? Simon Sinek says that the whole situation changes when someone has their phone out. What it's communicating, what it makes the other person feel like that they're meeting with, is that whatever might happen on their phone is more important than them. Do you know why they feel that way? Because it's true. Because it's true. And it doesn't matter, he says, if you turn your phone over. It doesn't change anything. Just the device being out. And in fact, he instructs us, put it on airplane mode and put it away out of sight when you're meeting with someone, when you're with your family.

There's a new term that has come up. It's called fubbing, which stands for phone snubbing. They're watching the impact of this on children. They're saying that with parents who consistently fub their children they're seeing the same side effects in their children as abandonment. And they're seeing behavior issues later in life tied to this activity.

So something has to change. That's why Jesus told us in Matthew 5, we may have to gouge it out. We may have to cut it off. Something you can do is, if you're expecting a phone call, you put your phone away and you say, “Hey, I'm going to check that in 10 minutes, but in the next 10 minutes, I'm gonna be all in with you. But then I'm going to check because I've got a call coming.” You can just explain that to them. But it doesn't have to remain out. But a lot of us, we hear that: “Hey, put our phone away at mealtimes.” That's a good idea, but we don't. We're not going to do it. Do you know why? Because we don't want to. That's why. This is consistent with the idea of addiction. And this is why we have to consider number three, “invite accountability”.

3. *INVITE ACCOUNTABILITY*

You have to invite accountability. Bring others into the problem. Okay. So, here's what I want you to do. How many of you have iPhones? Raise your hand if you have an iPhone. *[many hands raised]* Okay. Raise your hand if you have an Android. *[many hands raised]* Okay. I know you think you're better than us. You're not. *[chuckles]* Any of you have no phone? Anybody here, no phone? If there's hands raised in the room, can we just applaud them? Can we just thank them? *[applause]* Kudos to you. I don't know how you do it, but if you're here, praise God for you.

But what I want you to do with your iPhone is pull it out. And I don't really know how to do this on Android. If you do, because you have an Android, you probably know how, but go to settings. If you don't know how to find settings, just, swipe down to the search bar, type in settings and go to the main setting screen where you can put it on airplane mode and wifi and Bluetooth. Now go to battery and click on activity. May take a minute to load. And there you have your screen time. If you just scroll down a little bit, you'll see the first big number.

It's, something hours, something minutes. And then you have your apps right there. Look at those. Which is your most used app? How many of you show Instagram as your most used app? Facebook most used app? Text messages most used app? Okay. Bible, most used app? Okay. I want you to scroll down until you get to the Bible or really anything faith-based, anything kingdom-minded. And you might consider deleting the apps ahead of it or not using them or fasting from them.

What I want you to do now is screenshot this. So, scroll to where it has your screen time and your apps, and just push in the power button and the up button, the volume up button and screenshot it. Okay? And now I want you to text that to your life group. Say, "help." "Help!" Some of you don't want to. And I mean this as kindly as I can say it. It's not just the meds talking. But when was this ever about what **you** want? Like we're putting to death the deeds of the flesh. The scripture calls us to, this is an epidemic in our day and it's costing. It's literally taking our children from us.

First Corinthians 6:12 says, **“I have the right to do anything’ you say - but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’ but I will not be mastered by anything.”** Listen to this. The typical teen spends 270 minutes or four and a half hours on weekdays and 380 minutes on weekends looking at their phone. That's about 30 percent of the time that they're awake.

And so, Parents - here's the "Parents Corner:" You ready? I want all the parents in the room to say "NO." On three. One, two, three.... "NO!" [*parents respond*]

JP: "But everyone has one!"

Parents: "NO"

JP: "But I'm going to be the only one who doesn't!"

Parents: "NO"

And I get it. You're like, man, but what if we really mess our kids up by being too strict? You might, that's true. You might. But you absolutely will by giving them a device without boundaries. Okay. So, what we do in our house is we have a home phone that the kids can use when they're younger. And when they go into high school, they take that with them at all times and they know that it's OUR phone. They can use it, but it's OUR phone and this minimizes the challenges with privacy or us looking because it's our phones. I can look at it anytime I want. They know they're not to take it in their rooms. They know they're not to take it in the bathroom.

We, in pastoral ministry - we've seen an influx of online predators. We've seen an influx of sexual exploitation where someone gets a picture of someone and then they charge them ransom. It's happening and people aren't talking about it. But they'll talk to us about it. There's lots of articles on it, right? And you've just got to know that there are predators everywhere and I'm not fear mongering. Like the problem is - and this is well said - that we are too protective of our kids in the world and not protective enough in the virtual world where the bad guys truly are hiding. And so, number four, "cultivate community."

4. CULTIVATE COMMUNITY

Don't do this alone. What I mean by cultivate community is use your phone to bring people in face to face. Okay. Here's some more stats. Time spent hanging out in person dropped 20% from 2003 to 2023. Among people younger than 25, it dropped 35%. Adults having dinner with friends on any given night dropped 30%. In the same time span, the national restaurant association says 74 % of restaurant traffic was delivery or takeout in 2023. And so we're not doing life together.

Some of you're watching from afar and you've been doing that since COVID. It's time to gather with the saints again. Okay? If you're watching from another state and you're like, "This is my church. I go to Harris Creek." Then you need to bring other people into your living room. You need to invite them in so that you're not doing this alone. This is our corporate gathering. This is the gathering of the saints. So, use your device to get people to your table. Use your device to get face to face with others.

Some of you have missed community because you just didn't feel like going again. When was this about you? Stop building towers. Stop building towers. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, **"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the day approaching."** Don't forsake the gathering together. Cultivate community.

5. KEEP IN TOUCH.

This is a great, correct use of this device. [*holds up phone*] Proverbs 27:10 says, "Do not forsake your friend or a friend of your family..." Use this device to keep up with your people. Ya know I talk to my mom on Fridays, right? She lives three hours away, but we talk on this device every Friday. I know, you're like, "But I don't want to talk on it. I want to text. Who talks on the phone anymore?" Again, we want to be healthy. Mental illness is up, anxiety is up, depression is up, suicide is up. What are we going to do about it? What are we going to do about it? We've got to do something.

Use it to keep in touch with God. You have your Bible on it, right? I'm not saying it has to be the primary place where you read your Bible, but if you have some time in an airport or on the plane or wherever you're at, put it on airplane mode, read the scriptures.

With greater advancements come greater risks. More and more relationships are long distance today and your child can go to second base without being in the same zip code. You need to know that, right? And so, we have to be aware of these things. Ask questions and help our kids. I know they are so resistant but I've seen the product of parenting for over a decade. The kids that are helped most by the parents are so thankful.

And so, in summary, to help your phone, your device, be a blessing and not a curse; you're going to:

1. **Build Boundaries**
2. **Remove Distractions**
3. **Invite Accountability**
4. **Cultivate Community**
5. **Keep in Touch**

And you can remember this. Think about one of those first technologies. God's people as they get off the ark and they go about the world, He says be fruitful and multiply - and they build a tower. They used bricks with the invention of bricks. And so that's the acrostic there - **BRICK**. I think that can help you use your device as a blessing and not a curse. I don't want you to be discouraged. 1st Corinthians 10:13 says, **“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”**

Technology can be a blessing or a curse. Think about what's happening right now. This amazing team showing up, streaming this so that you can still catch the message. I know that it's not going to be the greatest delivery you've ever heard. I know it's kinda weird - different than normal. And yet, we can still do it because of technology. You guys didn't even notice. I got sick four times in the middle of the message. I'm sure because of some master editing.

I'll just end with this. My love language is “gifts”. I love buying gifts. I love giving them in creative ways. My wife - this is kinda lost on her. Her love language is “acts of service.” That's tough. But she wanted a Suburban. This was in the past, before ministry days. I was in the world. She wanted a Suburban. Yeah, I bought her an Escalade, Cadillac Escalade, and gave it to her in a creative way. Put it on the side of the road. Put a for sale sign on it. And I knew she'd see it in our neighborhood and she'd asked me to call on it. And so, I called and I said “they said all the information's in the glove box.” And when she opened it up and I just said, “Monica, it's yours, this is your new car.” And, she's grateful. She says “Oh babe, thanks.” But she just doesn't care that much about material things. Just said kinda “Oh thanks.” Well, one time for her birthday, I went to Home Depot and I got a box and I bought a master lock, just a padlock with a key. And I took the Sawzall and I cut a phone size hole in the top of the box, similar to what John talked about two weeks ago. She opened it and I said, “Hey, this is yours.” And I gave her the key. I said, “And this is yours and my phone's going to go in there when I get home.” And she wept. I mean she cried tears of gratitude, hysterical. I mean she wept - just in gratitude. There's something about that, right?

And so, what I gave the family this year for Christmas is this device. I think we have a picture. *[photo of device mounted on dashboard]* It says, ironically, (this is not a commercial for them) it says BRICK. I have no ties to this company. We get nothing, but it says BRICK. And what happens is, if you tap your phone to it, it “bricks” your phone. It makes it where you can just make phone calls. And so, when I get home, after work, I tap my phone. There's no battery in it. It's amazing technology. And I tap my phone to it. It makes my phone where I can just make phone calls. And it won't be unbricked until I go back in my car and tap it again. This allows me to be “in”.

Listen. I think I'm a good dad. We make memories. We have fun. We play games. We have meals together. But if my kids are going to have any complaint against me it's going to be that he was on his phone too much. The shot clock is running out. I'm about to launch one into the world, and I just don't want that to be her story.

And I don't want to shame you guys. Listen. The cross. It takes care of your wrongdoings. Jesus died for your sins. God raised him from the dead. And the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead can help you with your phone addiction. If you want help, He can help you build boundaries, remove distractions, invite accountability, cultivate community, and keep in touch.

Let me pray. *[praying]* Father, thank you for the amazing team that got here early this morning to make this happen. Thank you for technology and the blessing that it can be. Father, I pray that you would protect us from the enemy who wants to use it to curse us. And I pray that we would just seek You just as we find those boundaries, those times where our phone needs to be removed. Certainly, that when we're spending time with You that we would put our phone in the other room. Give us the courage to get away from it, to disconnect from it. Help us God. I'm afraid - not afraid - but concerned that we've gone too far. We need your help. We love you. We give you praise, and we worship you now in Jesus name.

Amen.