

Jesus and Technology

Matthew 22:34-40; September 24, 2017

I'm just curious. How many of you have a phone or tablet with you right now? If so, just hold them up. Ok, I'm going to invite the ushers to come forward. We're going to have them collect these and hold on to them for you and then you can grab them on the way out. Naw, I'm just kidding. Though I'd love for us to try this sometime, I won't do this to you today.

I'll be honest, there's a lot to like about our increasingly digital technological world.

- I've got a lightning fast connection to just about anyone, anywhere.
 - My family, my friends, missionaries serving on the other side of the world. For example, a week and a half ago I got a text from Joel Smith, one of our mission partners in South Asia, which said, "Hey bro, pray for the believers that we are sending out tonight. We are sending them out in unreached area. Pray for boldness and for persons of peace."
- There's so many useful things that I can take anywhere with me. My...
 - Bible: I can read the Bible anywhere.
 - Books (Kindle)
 - Contacts
 - Calendar
 - Email
 - Documents (Dropbox, Google Drive)
 - To Do List (Things)
 - Music (so long tapes and CD's)
- I've got my own personal travel and traffic assistant (Waze and Google Maps anyone?).
- I've got my own personal anything assistant (Siri: remind me to take out the trash).
- I can check the weather, the radar and the latest weather models (Dan Morgan and I were checking how far the lightning strikes were during Soccer Nights).
- I don't have to leave my house to go shopping. In fact, I can shop 24/7. Better than that, I can search the best deals and get the best price.
- Google (enough said). A number of you guys are here because you found us online.
- Every one of us has unmatched opportunities for online ministry and new gospel opportunities are opening as the online world is growing.

I love it, but I also hate it.

- Others have a lightning fast connection to me anytime and anywhere. At any moment someone may tap me on the shoulder (hold on a second, I just got a text): a text, a comment, a tweet, a post, a message, etc. These taps happen while we're eating, sleeping, driving the car, on a date, while I'm using the restroom, etc. . Some have described this as the "non-stop festival of human interaction."
- Phones cost money, data costs money, cases cost money, charging cords cost money.
- Anyone been sucked into the never-ending dark abyss of Facebook, scrolling down and down and down, wasting countless hours that we'll never ever be able to redeem. Or

mindless surfing the web. Or hours upon hours of Netflix.

- What about the ease of access to pornographic material?
- I find myself being increasingly distracted because of my phone. I can relate with Kevin DeYoung when he says, “I can’t seem to work for more than fifteen minutes without getting the urge to check my e-mail, glance at a blog, or get caught up on Twitter” (DeYoung, 81).
- Often times I feel as though my devices own me as much as I own them. “Dictator, distractor, foe!” (Tony Reinke). It’s often the first and last thing we look at everyday.

A few notes before I proceed:

- I’m preaching as much to myself today as I’m preaching to you. I have failed miserably and been very unwise at times with my use of technology (just ask my wife). I stand here today as a sinner who’s striving to become more like Jesus.
- I’m not anti-smartphone or a technophobe. In fact, I use it every day and, even after crafting this sermon, envision that it will be an integral part of my daily life moving forward.
- I’m not pro-smartphone or a technophiliac either. I’m not arguing that everyone needs to have a smartphone (shout out to my new brother-in-law, Wes, who doesn’t have a smartphone).
- I am for us all looking intently into the mirror today to allow God to discern the intentions and actions of our hearts. I’m for us all praying, “Father, as it relates to my phone usage, your kingdom come, your will be done.”

So here we find ourselves, roughly 10 years after the release of the first iPhone, asking ourselves, “How should we as Christians think about the use of digital technology?”

Before we being to formulate a robust answer to that question, let me take us way back to beginning of creation. There are two realities that have implications for how we think about technology.

1. Humans were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26).

- Being created in the image of God means that we (unlike animals) were wired and given the ability to dream, create and invent technologies.

2. Humans were given a creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply and then to fill the earth, subdue and have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28).

- The “be fruitful and multiply” command is a command to develop the social world (build families, churches, schools, cities and governments).
- The command to “subdue the earth” is a command to harness the natural world (plant crops, build bridges, design computers and compose music).

Putting these together, Tim Challies says, “If bearing the image of God is what gives us our *ability* to create. God’s mandate—his commanded purpose for human beings—is what drives our *desire* to create” (Challies, 22). The practical result of our creative activity is what we call

technology, from the most basic to the most advanced. Technologies serve us as we see God and even help us to serve him better.

Technology defined:

- “Technology is the creative activity of using tools to shape God's creation for practical purposes” (Challies, 23).
- My focus today is going to be on digital technology, particularly the use of smartphones.

Implications:

- Since we know the rest of the story and how sin entered into the world, we shouldn't be surprised that technology and tools have been created that are not honoring to God or used in a way honoring to God.
- So, we shouldn't blindly or thoughtlessly adopt every new technology just because we *can*. That would be worldliness.
- Tony Reinke, in his books, *12 Ways your Phone is Changing You*, says that the essential question is not, “what *can* I do with my phone, but what *should* I do with it” (Reinke, 197)?
- And to answer this question we must wrestle with larger questions of why we even exist in the first place at all.
 - First: What are my God-given goals and purposes in life?
 - Second: What technologies serve these goals?

This Sunday, we're going to use the Great Commandment as a framework for shaping how we think and approach digital technology.

Read Matthew 22:34-40

Jesus, when asked what was the “great commandment in the Law,” replied with an answer that's easy for us to understand but often so hard to go and do.

- He first quotes the Shema in Deut. 6:5 and says “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”
 - Concerning love, scholar D. A. Carson writes, “Love in the truest sense demands abandonment of self to God, and God alone is the adequate incentive for such abandonment” (Carson, 464).
 - This is a call to love God with our entire being. Our love for God is to come from our whole person, our entire faculty and capacity. All that I am in love for God.
- He then quotes Leviticus 19:18 and says, “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
- He then concludes: “On these two commandments depends all the Law and the Prophets.”
 - Practically, the Ten Commandments breakdown into these two categories.
 - The first four: no others gods, no idols, don't use the Lord's name in vain, keep the sabbath = love God.

- The next six: honor your father and mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not covet = love your neighbor.
- To say that all of Scripture “hangs” on these two commandments means that all of Scripture demands total allegiance to God through loving him and loving one’s neighbor.

Transition to thinking about our use of digital technology:

- “...Jesus boils down the purpose and aim of our lives into two goals: treasure God with your whole being, and then pour out your God-centered joy in the love for others. On these two commands all other smartphone laws depend” (Reinke, 190). Matt. 22:34-40.

The point: Fill the void of your digital hunger with delight in Jesus.

- If the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever and then to love your neighbor as yourself, then we should ask the following two questions about our use of digital technology:

I. Does my use of digital technology move me towards or away from delighting in Jesus?

Additional questions to ask:

- Does it help me to better love God or hinder me?
- Does it express my freedom in Jesus or my bondage/slavery to sin?
- Is your screen strangling your soul?

I’m concerned about the following dangers that smartphones potentially pose to our truly delighting in Jesus.

1. It can distract us from what’s most important.

- Tony Reinke talks about C. S. Lewis’ “Nothing” strategy which he writes about in *The Screwtape Letters*.
 - “I now see that I spend most of my life in doing neither what I ought nor what I liked” (Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 60).
 - “This ‘Nothing’ strategy is ‘very strong: strong enough to steal away a man’s best years, not in sweet sins, but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why...’” (Lewis, STL, 60).
 - “We give our time to what is not explicitly sinful, but also to what cannot give us joy or prepare us for self-sacrifice. Satan’s “Nothing” strategy aims at feeding us endlessly scrolling words, images, and videos that dull our affections—instead of invigorating our joy and preparing us to give ourselves in love” (Reinke, 192).
- All the taps on the shoulder, the pings, alerts, beeps, etc. It’s nonstop. If left unchecked, it can blind our souls from God.

“As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the

world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.” (Matthew 13:22 ESV)

- Do my smartphone habits distract me from thinking about my death, the return of Christ, and eternal realities?

2. It can hinder our worship of God and communion with him.

- I’m concerned that we have more of a compulsive fidget more for our phones than we do for God and his Spirit.
- One of the great virtues of our days is efficiency. We want to do more and more things and do them quicker and faster than ever. But, as Challies notes, that’s a dangerous mindset to bring to our faith. He notes, “We do not want to become *efficient* worshipers.... We do not want to be *hurried* worshipers who value speed over quality.... We need to be Christians who take time to give sustained focus to one thing—the worship of the living God. He does not call us to study his Word or to worship him more efficiently” (Challies, 126).
- “Apps can help me stay focused on my Bible reading plans and help me organize my prayer life, but no app can breathe life into my communion with God” (Reinke, 194).
- Do my smartphone habits distract me from genuine communion with God?

3. It can hinder our daily pursuit of God through his Word.

- This value of efficiency combined with another effect of smartphones, skimming, poses a huge danger pursuing God daily through his Word. That requires dedicated thought and meditation, something that smartphones can hinder. The Bible isn’t a book to be skimmed over, it is the very words of God.
- For what it’s worth, 95% of the time I read a hard copy of the Bible. I find that I read more slowly and meditatively when I read from a printed book.
- If you use your smartphones or tablets to read the Bible, you’ve got to find a way to not get distracted by everything else (beeps, buzzes, notifications, etc.).

4. It can hinder us from talking to and hearing from God in prayer.

- What do many of us do when we get some downtime? When we’re stopped at a red light? When we’re standing in line at the grocery store?
- Does technology fill up all of the silent gaps of your life? If so, when do you talk to God? How can you even hear from God?
- Are we more eager to grip our phones or grip the throne of grace?
- “Do my smartphone habits mute the sporadic leading of God’s Spirit in my life?” (Reinke).

5. It can become an idol itself and enable and empower the other idols of our lives.

- What is an idol: “It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.” (Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, xvii)
- How do you identify idols: “A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your

life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living.” (Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, xviii)

- “Our phones are addictive, and, like addicts, we seek hits immediately in the morning.” (Reinke, 42).
- “To numb the sting of this emptiness, we turn to the ‘new and powerful antidepressants of a non-pharmaceutical variety’—our smartphones” (Reinke, 46, quoting Andrew Sullivan).
- One idol that technology enables is sex and lust.
 - Here’s why it’s so dangerous: you can do this anonymously and in secret and that’s where sin flourishes and will destroy your soul.
 - Tony Reinke calls pornography use among Christians a spiritual epidemic, “costing a whole generation of young Christians their joy in Christ and corroding young souls by the acid of unchecked lust” (Reinke, 135).
- Let’s be honest: the clicks of our fingertips reveal what’s going on in our hearts.
- The bad news is that nothing of this is hidden before God’s eyes. The good news is that Jesus died for your idols so that he might become the greatest treasure of your life.

What’s the solution?

- “True freedom from the bondage of technology comes not mainly from throwing away the smartphone, but from filling the void with the glories of Jesus that you are trying to fill with the pleasures of the device” (John Piper, *When Should I Get Rid of My Smartphone?*, www.desiringgod.org).

II. Does my use of digital technology help me or hinder me from loving others?

I’m concerned about the following dangers that smartphones potentially pose to hindering us from loving and serving others.

1. It can deaden us to the true need of our families and neighbors.

- Do you know how many minutes the average person spends on Facebook a day? It’s 50 minutes.
- “Facebook becomes a safe and sanitized room where I can watch the ups and downs of others as an anonymous specter, with no compulsive impulse to respond and care in any meaningful way. And as I do, I become more and more blind to the flesh and blood around me” (Reinke, 52).
- “In the digital age (as was true in the predigital age), remote people and concerns can command our undue attention, blinding us to the immediate needs around us. As we drive, our phones *ping*, our brains get a shot of dopamine, and very often our decisions express our own neighbor negligence. We assume we can ignore the people we see in order to care for the people we don’t see, but that idea is all twisted backward. We sin with our phones when we ignore our street neighbors, the strangers who share with us the same track of pavement” (Reinke, 58).
- Do my smartphone habits disengage me from the needs of the neighbors God has placed

right in front of me?

2. It can hinder our ability to relate to one another face to face.

- “Now, real-world communication feels threatening, less natural, less normal than typing a text message. It is not unusual to observe two girls sitting in the same room, mere feet from one another, texting back and forth” (Challies, 77).
- “In a strange way, we now find that *more* communication actually leads to *less* communication, or at least less *real-world* communication and less significant communication” (Challies, 77).
- “So we do not accept virtual encounters as adequate substitutions for flesh and blood relationships” (DeYoung, 87).

3. It can tempt us not to love others but to compare ourselves to others and hate others.

- Jealousy, envy, judgment, self-worthy, self-approve, self-image, selfie.
- Love leads to self-control, honor, respect.
- Challies gives the following three suggestions for engaging online:
 - Be visible (reject anonymity), be accountable, be real, be mature.
 - Pray before you engage online, before you send that email.

Conclusion:

- We’ve talked about how we should think about the use of digital technology. The essential question isn’t what *can* you do but what *should* you do. I can’t tell you what you *should* do, that’s the Holy Spirit’s role, but I can give you some tangible options and next steps to consider. Above all, what we all need right now is what Challies calls “disciplined discernment.”

1. Deliberately and consistently evaluate your use of digital technology.

- You can’t just make a decision today about your use of technology and be done with it. You must build in intentional times to reflect, evaluate and let others evaluate and give feedback.
- Additionally, I only addressed the tip of the iceberg today. There’s so many issues that I just didn’t have time to address. For some of you, you need to buy a book Tony Reinke’s *12 Ways your Phone is Changing You* and slowly read through it, introspectively. In fact, I’ve purchased 15 copies and they are on sale in the lobby today for \$9 (you won’t find a cheaper price, trust me). Who wants to join me on a journey of reading this together, one chapter a week for the next 12 weeks? Purchase your copy today and if you’re willing, leave your name so I can checkin with you and see what you’re learning.

2. Regularly disconnect and turn your devices off.

- Andy Crouch, in his book *The Tech-Wise Family*, suggests one hour a day, one day a week and one week a year.
- Consider disconnecting completely when...
 - Eating with your family members or friends.
 - Spending time with family members or friends

- You are at church
- Dad gets home
- You're doing your devotions

3. Wake up before your devices do and put them to bed before you go to bed.

- Many suggest to keep your phone out of the bedroom entirely.

4. Seek out accountability

- Invite your spouse, your friends, and your family members to offer feedback on your phone habits (more than 70 percent of Christians in my survey said nobody else knew how much time they spent online).
- Andy Crouch suggests that spouses have one another's passwords and parents have total access to children's devices.

5. Step away from using a smartphone for a season.

6. Choose to be all-in and present in the moment.

- Much of what we quickly respond to (the taps on the shoulder) can wait. Respond at a later, more convenient time.

7. Do one or more of the following to your phone today:

- Turn off all nonessential push notifications (I've done this).
- Delete expired, nonessential, and time-wasting apps.
- Move certain apps to places where you don't see them (my mail app isn't on my home screen).
- You don't have to use all of the features on your phone.

These are all great suggestions, but my sermon today has failed if you just leave adjusting your smartphone habits. What I'm after and what God wants is for you to delight in Christ more. And unless you leave with a fresh desire and pursuit to enjoy Jesus, your momentary guilt over your failed usage will wane. What we need as a church are "new life disciplines birthed from a new set of life priorities empowers by our new life freedom in Jesus" (Reinke, 21).

The point: Fill the void of your digital hunger with delight in Jesus.