



The Christian

LIVING IN TODAY'S TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

The “English” (everyone who is not Amish) often admire the Amish for their resistance to modern inventions and technology. Perhaps that’s because although we enjoy the many advantages of modern technology, we also realize there are dangers that come with them. In reality however, the Amish do accept new technology. Nearly all Amish have stoves and refrigerators in their homes – albeit they run on propane gas. Most have access to telephones that are kept in their phone shacks at the end of the driveway, and many use solar cells to power their electric fences and batteries to keep their buggy lights flashing. The difference between the Amish and the English is not whether to use modern technology, but where to draw the line. Each Amish church or “district” discusses new advances in technology that might benefit the individual community. They carefully study the positive and negative effects new innovations will have on their lives and their devotion to God. Unfortunately, unlike the Amish, we are excited to accept new gadgets, platforms, or educational advancements before we weigh their positive or negative effects. All too often by the time we have discovered the dangers, the problem is difficult to reverse.

We must be clear that technology by itself is not evil and can be a blessing to society. The inventions of the saw, printing press, gas powered engine, telephone, and light bulb were all technological advances that still serve us well today. We can add to that list tremendous technological advances in the medical field, business and accounting, education, and communication. Each of these have benefitted us greatly. And much of that technology is available in our schools, businesses, homes and even in our back pockets. However, now that we have these new advances, we must rely on God to guide us that we might use them in a proper and God-pleasing way.

Think of what we can no do with the 3”x5” piece of metal, glass, and battery called a smartphone. This single item includes maps, encyclopedias, newspapers, books, calendars, an alarm clock, wrist watch, notepad, weather station, phone, camera, shopping mall, music player, typewriter, movie screen, banking assistant, file cabinet, recorder, blood pressure and insulin check, and of course a Bible. Is it any wonder that some people have come to rely so heavily on this single object that they become physically ill when it is out of sight or reach?

What are some recent advances in technology that have been a blessing to you?

WE ARE FIRST GOD’S CHILDREN

As with every worldly influence that affects God’s children, proper use and purpose depend on what God says. Interestingly, he has given us examples in his Word regarding the use of technology. Two of the most astounding engineering technological wonders ever attempted are detailed in Genesis. The ark, truly a structure that defies logic, was designed and built to save God’s people from an impending disaster. It was made to the glory of God and served as a safe place for God’s children and creatures. Here technology was used for a good and noble purpose. A few chapters later, however, we read the account of the tower of Babel, also an engineering feat ahead of its time. Yet this was built to glorify mankind and it served Satan’s plans to distract

God's creatures from his purpose. Just like everything in this sinful world, technology serves God's people only insofar as it gives glory to God and accomplishes his divine will. For instance, if one feels guilt over the amount of time spent and the personal information shared on social media, perhaps it is time to ask if, like the tower of Babel, technology has taken control of us. Just because something is new and innovative or because it may contain some grains of good does not make it God-pleasing. God's children must be constantly reminded to weigh all things in the light of God's will and purpose. 1 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."

Perhaps the best way to begin a discussion on technology is to first agree that we will not allow anything to enter our lives unless it is first filtered through the lens of God's Word. 1 Thessalonians 5:21,22 tells us to "Test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil." And again in Colossians 3:2 we read, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Or stated quite simply, "What would Jesus do?"

TIME

For many years media technology was entirely passive. We listened to music. We watched TV. We read books. Information always moved in one direction—toward us. Since the 1970s with the advent of video games, technology has become active. Today information flows interactively in both directions. This has introduced a new generation, one that is quite different from our great-grandparents' day. As a result, many adults now see their children or grandchildren as strangers who live in their own "techie" worlds. New technology is being introduced at breakneck speed, and everyone is being enticed not to miss a thing. According to a recent Barna study, 8 in 10 parents say their duties of parenting are more complicated today because of technology. And that is not only that their children are being affected by it, but it is that they themselves have fallen to its lure and find themselves distracted by it. Seventy percent of parents surveyed say they go to bed with their phones. Of those parents, 80% said their teens also take their phones to bed. Research contends that children spend an average of 5 to 6 hours a day on an electronic device. That's nearly a third of their waking hours.

The gift of time is something we take for granted. We are given 24 hours each day to serve God and others. How we use that time is important. Sisters Mary and Martha invited Jesus to come into their home to spend some time with them. While Mary used her time to listen to Jesus' words, Martha felt her time could be best used to prepare the meal. Both were using their time for good purposes, yet Jesus scolded Martha for misdirecting her time. Her preoccupation with the meal had risen above the more important "one thing needful." When do the tools of technology demand so much of our time that it affects our moments in prayer, reading God's word, regular worship, conducting daily personal and family devotions, showing care and concern for those we love, or sharing the gospel message with others? Or when does it simply preoccupy our minds with worldly things? Ephesians 5:15,16 emphasizes that point: "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." One of the prominent dangers of social media is that it demands so much time that it slowly begins to pre-empt time better spent with the Lord and for his kingdom. Be certain this is no coincidence. There is nothing Satan would like more than to distract God's children from their purpose on earth. Stealing time through technology has been a big winner for him. For example, when Satan can train God's people to replace prayer at the beginning and end of each day with checking their smartphones, he has scored a victory.

Many people don't realize that smartphones are difficult to put down by design. They are intended to be addictive. Apps and other devices are designed to keep one hooked for as long as possible. Phone addiction that keeps one from carrying out daily chores, responsibilities, duties, and connection with the Lord, is no mistake. (Tristan Harris is a former design ethicist for Google who spent ten years researching the use of psychological forces in technology and has now co-founded the Center for Humane Technology. As a former "insider," his web

site provides much helpful information regarding the design and intent behind some of the most popular technology today. Visit humanetech.com.)

How have some parents fallen prey to the “do as I say, not as I do” attitude?

PERSONAL CONTACT

A 2012 survey of one thousand teens asked what their favorite way to communicate was. They answered “in person.” That same question was asked in 2018 and the new answer was, “texting.” This substantial shift alerts us that a basic behavior is being changed in the younger generation. That behavior is one’s personal relationship with others. In place of personal interaction, many today would rather sit alone and text their friends. It is ironic that despite the fact that many boast about the huge number of “friends” on Facebook, a major problem facing millions of young people is loneliness. Loneliness is “the loss of embodied relationships.” Is it healthy to spend hours each day interacting with friends online, or buried in a computer program, or do we need to spend time face-to-face to be physically, emotionally, and mentally healthy?

A reason for Eve’s creation was so man would not be alone. (Genesis 2:18). Humans are made to have personal relationships with each other. The apostle John makes an interesting comment in his second letter. He says, “I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete.” Why face-to-face? Does that really make a difference?

In his book *The Tech Talk*, psychologist Michael Horne writes that people communicate on four different levels. The first is the “verbal” level, the simple conversation. The second level is “tone of voice.” By emphasizing certain words and thoughts we communicate what is on our minds. One can write a five word statement and have it say five different things because of the emphasis on different words. Level three is nonverbal, or “facial expression.” What are we saying with our eyes or mouth? The fourth is “body language.” Where are we looking when we speak? Are we hunched over or standing proudly? We find these four areas in face-to-face communication. Relationships are seldom nurtured through remote connections. We have an inner longing to share our lives with family, friends, and marriage partners. To make matters worse, we often engage in these disconnected conversations at the expense of those around us. Have you ever seen a table of five people in a restaurant, all of whom were on their smartphones?

The danger we and our families must try to avoid is that of becoming socially isolated or even completely antisocial. The site www.rampages.com produced an interesting article titled, “The Negative Impacts of Social Media on Face-to-Face Interactions.” It included these comments, “The use of communication online for children has obviously increased drastically over the past few years. This has led to them having fewer relationships down the road in life. These interactions online are having a detrimental effect on their emotional health that is seemingly irreversible. Children that begin learning how to interact with one another online are always behind the curve when it comes to having deep emotional connections with people and as a result, tend to struggle to make and hold onto friends for long periods of time. They can never fully be invested with one another and that is where the problem truly lies. Future generations can no longer maintain the same level of friends that other generations have been able to in the past. . . If nothing is done, there will be a society filled with socially awkward individuals who can no longer hold a conversation in a normal, modern social environment.”

Is it any wonder that the Lord placed great emphasis on public worship? Publicly worshipping alongside those with whom we share a common faith is important. It allows us to interact with others as we worship and praise God. Hebrews 10:24,25 says, “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.”

Have you noticed a decline in personal face-to-face relationships? Explain.

OTHER RELATED CONCERNS

● **Friends.** Recent studies concur that increased smartphone use can bring about anxiety and depression. Social media often presents a false sense of ourselves and our relationship with others. Instant friendship is the new fad. (Likewise “unfriending” has also become popular.) Even though many of the “friends” are total strangers, for many young people this has added a new dimension of tension as young people strive to become someone they are not in order to keep and achieve more friends. There is a never-ending competition to present one’s looks, personality, and possessions to others in order to be continually accepted. Self-worth is often distorted by likes and dislikes. This distortion of reality is Satan’s way of telling them that God did not make them as special and unique persons whom he loves and cares for. Rather, it presents the false sense that what others think is more important than what God thinks. Many young people have been duped into believing they have established real friendships when really they are superficial and lacking in depth. Likewise many young people fear they will be unfriended or that someone will destroy their reputation with a few nasty messages. As cyberbullying increases, so does the chance for depression or even suicide. We should keep in mind the words of James 4:4, “Don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

How much control do you feel a parent should have over their child’s phone?

● **Language and manners.** Studies have found that the lack of personal conversation is also producing an age of poor language usage and loss of personal manners. Although technology has created a society that can communicate instantly, many no longer have the ability to communicate verbally face-to-face. It has become clear that many college graduates have little ability to function with the English language. Their communication comfort zone is strictly within their cyber world that communicates with their fingers. Along with those changes, experts are finding that those who use social media excessively lose touch with proper manners that are necessary in everyday life such as in business, the community, at home or at school.

● **Cost.** One would assume that electronic technology should save money in the long run. Quite the opposite is true. According to a poll by the American Institute of CPAs, consumers spend an average of \$166 each month to pay for things like cable TV, home Internet access, mobile phone service and digital subscriptions or 17% of their monthly rent or mortgage payment. Downloading apps, songs, movies, etc. add another \$38 a month.

How might Satan use the expense of keeping up with the latest technology to affect our church giving?

● **Loss of privacy.** Few people realize the vast amount of material that is gathered regarding their personal lives. Although there are supposed to be ways to erase some of the materials, the harvest of one’s data is astounding. According to an article by Dylan Curran of The Guardian, Google knows the following: where you have been and at what time, your photos, the terms you search for, everything you’ve deleted, your advertising profile, all the apps you use, your YouTube history, your Word documents, bookmarks, e-mails, every question you’ve asked your Google device, and your contacts. In addition to this your webcam and microphone can also be accessed.

Is there a danger that the vast amount of information these companies possess be used against Christians?

● **Loss of worldview.** With great amounts of time spent on social media, there is also the danger of disconnecting with things happening in the world. There is a tendency to disengage oneself with God’s world and his plans. Many young people today no longer live in the real world. They are completely oblivious to current events.

● **Always on stage.** Cameras serve a good purpose unless one becomes addicted to self-photos or “selfies.” This can become a disturbing habit. Being constantly in the limelight can easily lead to an unhealthy sense of self. Romans 12:3 says, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” Studies have found that this has caused eating disorders and even an increase in plastic surgery among young people. Certainly this also includes the horrible acts of nude or suggestive photos shared with “friends” (and also the whole world.)

● **Becoming who you are not.** Ephesians 4:29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” A danger many young and old have fallen into is that they lose their inhibitions and consciences when corresponding with others in a non-personal way. 2 Timothy 2:16 tells us to, “Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.” Bad language, coarse jokes, gossip, sinful photos, and brash comments come easy when sent from the confines of one’s bedroom. Always remember that whatever is sent is out there forever. One way to check this is to ask yourself if you would object to Jesus listening in on your conversation.

● **Not everyone on the Internet has pure motives.** Parents should constantly check their children’s networking. Numerous families have tragically discovered that their children had been corresponding with evil people. First Peter 5:8 reminds us, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

● **Introduction of worldly philosophy.** Studies suggest that ready access or connectivity with worldly philosophies have also taken their toll on Christians. An upsurge in acceptance of Islam, sexual freedom, socialism, and anti-Christianity can be traced to a constant barrage of tolerance seen today on phones and computers. Another danger lies in the fact that 60% of Christians say they search for spiritual content online, much of which is non-biblical. 2 Timothy 4:3,4 says, “To suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”

● **Internet pornography and children.** According to Michael Horne, PsyD, author of *The Tech Talk*, the largest group of pornography consumers are children ages 12-17. The average age of a child’s first online pornography exposure is 11 years old. Ninety percent of kids 8-16 admitted viewing pornography online – often while doing homework. This is how many children are learning about sexuality. Even standard websites include tempting sexual side bars and links meant to draw the viewer to other sites not pleasing to God. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 says, “Avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God.”

Pornography has never been so accessible as to be one click away. How does one fight this temptation?

● **Poor sleep habits.** Medical science agrees that in a day when life should be easier and rest more readily available, things are heading in the opposite direction because of the addiction to technology. Overuse of tech devices can greatly impair the number of sleep hours necessary for children and adults.

● **Becoming a different person.** If the computer screen or smartphone encourages sinful thoughts or makes one a less holy person in any way, changes must be made. That might mean cutting it out entirely or at least placing huge restrictions on it. 1 Peter 1:15 says, “Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.” In a survey

by www.desiringgod.org young people were asked how they felt toward their use of social media. Nearly 40% of the respondents admitted it was “uncontrolled, unhealthy, and probably not good for me.”

- **Kids accept anything.** It is amazing what children will accept as absolute truth. Parents must monitor everything their children are viewing being certain it expresses their values and faith. Children should be warned that many will deceive them with lies. John 8:44 tells us, “There is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

Name platforms that you or your children are not allowed to partake in.

- **Screen danger.** Much has been written about the danger of too much screen time for children and adults. The American Academy of Pediatrics says children two and under should not spend time in front of a screen. Excessive screen time has also been connected with obesity, sleep disturbances, education problems and even a propensity to violence. Many children are now required to spend hours of their schooldays glued to screens including iPads and Chromebooks. Some children become so zoned in to the screen mentality that it is difficult to get their attention away from the screen.

Do you have guidelines set for yourself or your family regarding screen time? Share.

- **M-Rated video games.** Many parents don’t realize that an M rating on a video game is equivalent to an R rated movie – 17 and up viewing. (Unfortunately most of the top selling video games are rated M.) Many of these games are violent, sexual in nature, and sinful in other ways. For instance, we are moving as a society from the problem of watching violence in movies to causing violence in video games.

One of the great inventions that brought us to this point was the telegraph. At its unveiling, Samuel Morse sent the following words, “What hath God wrought?” The Lord has blessed us with an ability to collect vast amounts of knowledge through today’s technology and communicate that knowledge around the world in an instant. For the Christian this is exciting because these tools can be used to give glory to God and to share the message of salvation. God’s people always remember the words of 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

1 John 2:15-17 says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.” The pressures of society indeed pull on us and our families. Satan never stops his prowling, and he continues to find new and exciting ways to lure our hearts away from our Savior. Yet we cannot despair or become weary of the fight, for our strength lies in the Word. We can find strength and confidence in the words of Jesus from John 16:33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

What do you feel is the number one danger social media presents to you or your family?

With the huge advancement of electronic technology and how it is changing our behavior, where do you see society ten years from now? Twenty-five years?

What are some ways electronic technology can be used to benefit the Lord’s kingdom?

PERSONAL SUGGESTIONS

- Take periodic breaks of hours or days away from the media.
- Set boundaries for yourself. Limit your number of connections per day.
- Turn off notifications on your smartphone.
- Prayerfully consider the purpose for your use of social media. Is it to give praise to God and share his word with others?
- Talk about misuse and proper use of social media with church, family and friends. Often you will find others dealing with the same issues you are.
- Fight the urge to keep up with those around you with the latest platforms or gadgets for fear you might miss something or be left in the dark. Newer is not always better.
- Limit yourself to the number of channels or platforms.
- Pray that your conversations will be God pleasing and that your use of the blessing of technology might be properly used in your life and your home.
- Remove the smartphone from the bedroom at night.
- Overcome the desire to look at your phone.
- Use a regular alarm clock.
- Separate monthly costs for tech spending in your home. Then budget accordingly.

FAMILY SUGGESTIONS

- All internet-accessible devices should remain in public areas in the home, and desktops should be positioned so that monitors can easily be seen by everyone.
- No internet-accessible devices in the bathroom.
- Smartphones and tablets should be kept out of the bedroom.
- By a certain time each night all devices need to be charging on the kitchen counter where they remain until the next day.
- Rules must be established as to what games are allowed to be played in the house or at friends' homes.
- Time limits must be set for playing electronic games, social media use, television, etc.
- Parents must insist they have the right to check Facebook, Twitter, Snap-Chat, or other Instagram accounts. (This might cause two responses: first, "You're invading my privacy." This cannot be true since everything they post is open to everyone. The internet isn't private. Second, "You don't trust me." That is not necessarily true. You trust the child – it is everybody else online you do not trust.
- Parents can better deal with pornography problems if there is a good established relationship between parents and children. Children should feel comfortable discussing the problems of pornography that will come their way. This often works better than putting numerous blocks on the system. Also, practice what you preach.
- Find family engaging things to replace screen time. Games, puzzles, gardening, hobbies, hiking, music, movies, and bike rides can all become positive and enjoyable family activities.
- Never interact with someone you do not know.
- Never post a photo wearing something you would not wear in public.
- Do not chat late at night.
- Include in your child's play time real relationships and tactile things. Painting with a paintbrush is different from making tablet art. The actual act of playing with a toy or game is more beneficial than doing so on a screen. Interacting with playmates is far better than playing alone on a computer.
- Fight these two lies regarding your children's use of technology: 1. If I limit the technology the kids will fall behind their peers; and 2. Technology makes a good babysitter.