

LIGHT

KINGDOM • CULTURE



Summer 2018
Volume 4, Issue 1



24

Russell Moore and Andy Crouch discuss the family and technology.

16

Lindsay Nicolet on the story of YouVersion and its global reach.

14

How Billy Graham used technology to spread the gospel.

OCTOBER 11-13, 2018

DALLAS, TX



2018

THE

ERLC

**CROSS-SHAPED
FAMILY**

NATIONAL CONFERENCE



ERLC.COM/EVENTS

SPEAKERS



RUSSELL MOORE • BETH MOORE • JEN WILKIN • RAY ORTLUND • AARON IVEY • AND MORE

GOOGLE KNOWS WHO YOU ARE. DO YOU?

Russell Moore



I MAGINE IF YOU HAD a truth serum that could force you to reveal who you really are—what you really think, feel, and value? You already do, kind of, in the search engine on your computer, phone, and devices.

In the book, *Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, and What the Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are*, author Seth Stephens-Davidowitz makes the case that mined data from our online searches is more reliable for research purposes than polls and surveys. He learned people don't tell the truth about themselves to interviewers; they don't always tell the truth about themselves to themselves.

But they'll tell Google.

Netflix and other streaming services have figured this out. Previously, they evaluated our preferences based on films we placed in the queue to watch. Netflix found, however, people tend to fill it with highbrow, aspirational films, not the lowbrow comedies and romance flicks they actually watch. The queue reveals what kind of person he wants to be; what he chooses reveals who he actually is.

When searching online, though, people don't preen or pretend. They are alone, seeking out answers to questions they really have. "What are the symptoms of stomach cancer?" or,

"How do I get rid of kitchen mold?" or, "Is it normal for a teenager to sneak out at night?"

The book shows the difference between the way people talk about their lives and families, and what they really think about both. On social media, women often speak of their husbands as being "awesome," and so forth. When they Google questions about their husbands, they're usually asking why he's so mean or doesn't want sex.

This shouldn't surprise biblical theists. Scripture tell us, after all, primal humanity hides in shame before God (Gen. 3:8-10). We hide our brokenness not just from others, but from ourselves (Jer. 17:9). On the mission field or in the church, we shouldn't rely on what people tell us about how happy or content or pious they are. We should know that, below the surface, they're often churning with resentment, anger, shame, and fear.

The human heart thinks it can cover its paths before God, saying, "The Lord does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive" (Ps. 94:7). The truth is, we can't even hide from Google. How can we hide from God?

That's why this issue of *Light* is devoted to technology. Technology doesn't create new glories or new depravities. The former is as old as creation, the latter as old as the Fall. Technology can equip us to carry out the mission of Christ easier and faster, as well as ensnare us in the ways of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Technology can scare us by how inhuman it can be, but it can also scare us by reminding us how human we are.

WHEN SEARCHING ONLINE, PEOPLE
DON'T PREEN OR PRETEND. THEY
ARE ALONE, SEEKING OUT ANSWERS
TO QUESTIONS THEY REALLY HAVE.

Google and Amazon and Facebook might know you better than you do. But they don't love you.

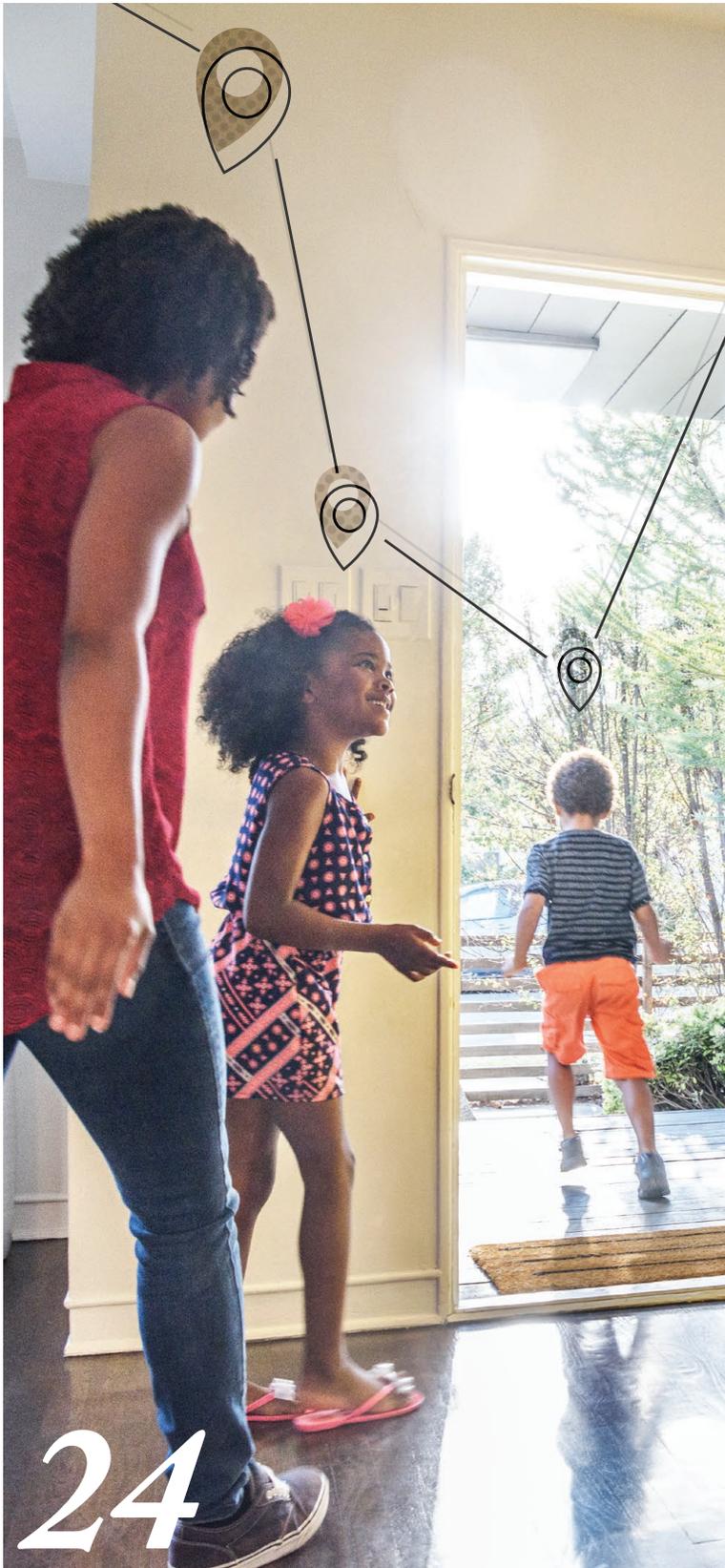
In the Gospel of John, Jesus startled both Nathanael and the woman at the well (John 1:43-51; 4:29), telling them things about themselves they didn't think he could possibly know. Both then asked a ver-

sion of the question, "How do you know me?" (John 1:48).

We would do well to ask the same. Jesus knew all about them, and all about us, and sought them, and us, out anyway (Luke 15:4-5). That's good news. Technology can be exhilarating or terrifying. But in the whirl of change, this remains: Jesus knows you better than Google.

He searches better too. ★

CONTENTS



PERSPECTIVES

10 I AM NOT MY AVATAR

What does our use of technology say about our humanity, and how can the church, with its ancient spiritual practices, help form distracted hearts?

12 PASTORING IN LIGHT OF TECHNOLOGY

How can pastors lead their congregations to spiritual health in a tech-saturated world? *Trevor Atwood* provides three simple tips.

14 PREACHING BEYOND THE STADIUM

Billy Graham was the 20th century's greatest preacher—and likely one of the greatest pioneers of technology. *Benjamin Phillips* traces Graham's use of technology throughout his ministry.

16 THE BIBLE AS AN APP

Bobby Gruenewald envisioned a way he could more faithfully engage with the Bible. *Lindsay Nicolet* tells the story of You-Version and how it turned into a God-ordained global movement.

19 INTERVIEW: TECHNOLOGY AS A TOOL

Our children will be exposed to hi-tech gear throughout their lives, especially the smartphone. *Julie Masson* and *Dorena Williamson* give practical tips for training and protecting kids in a digital age.

SPOTLIGHT

24 THE TECH-WISE FAMILY

Russell Moore talks with *Andy Crouch*, author of *The Tech-Wise Family*, about family, smartphones, and how the two can co-exist and thrive.

30 THE TENSION OF TECHNOLOGY

The future of technology incites people to fear, excitement, and ambivalence. *Jason Thacker* shows us how we can bring our thoughts in line with God's Word.

33 TECHNOLOGY & ONLINE COMMUNICATION

Social media has changed the way we communicate—for good and bad. So, *Chris Martin* reminds us, Christians need to pay particular attention to how we represent Christ online.

37 TECHNOLOGY & ECONOMICS

Can the technological changes in currency be used by Christians to further God's kingdom? *Taylor Barkley* helps us evaluate the pros and cons of economic innovations like Bitcoin.

40 HOW "PUSH NOTIFICATIONS" ARE RESHAPING OUR LIVES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND COMMUNICATION

Attention spans dwindle and relationships suffer as smartphone notifications increasingly take over our lives. In a world that's always connected, *Brett McCracken* urges us to intentionally evaluate our habits.

43 LET THE NATIONS READ

Bible translation used to be an arduous task. But *Lauren McAfee* demonstrates how modern technology is making it easier and faster to translate Scripture into all the world's languages.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

7 FROM THE EDITOR

8 BOOK REVIEWS

46 RESOURCES

LIGHT

Light Magazine Volume 4, Issue 1
Copyright © 2018 The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission

Editor-in-Chief *RUSSELL MOORE*

Editor *DANIEL DARLING*

Managing Editor *LINDSAY NICOLET*

Staff Editor *MARIE DELPH*

Creative Director *JASON THACKER*

Graphic Designer *JACOB BLAZE*

The ministry of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (SBC) is made possible by the sacrificial gifts of Southern Baptists to the Cooperative Program. We are grateful for the Cooperative Program and the prayerful support of Southern Baptists around the world.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Light Magazine is a semiannual publication of The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. Print subscriptions are available for \$10/year at erlc.com/light. Electronic versions, as well as previous issues, are available at ERLC.com.

CONNECT ONLINE

[f](https://www.facebook.com/erlcsbc) /erlcsbc

[@erlc](https://twitter.com/erlc)

[@erlcsbc](https://www.instagram.com/erlcsbc)

www.ERLC.com



THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION



On the cover, designer Jacob Blaze depicts technology's ability to both assist and interrupt.

HOW THE GOSPEL SHAPES THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

FREE E-BOOK
BY RUSSELL MOORE



ERLC.COM/LIFE

YES KIDS, WE SURVIVED WITHOUT SMARTPHONES



REMEMBER WHEN MY father came home with one of the first car phones. It was a Uniden, roughly the size of a phone book and probably weighed more than a small child. This novelty had to be plugged into the cigarette lighter in our car and had to have an antenna stuck to the

front of our windshield. We tried to keep our calls under 30 seconds to prevent exorbitant charges.

We thought it was cool. We also thought it would change life as we knew it. And we were right.

Today, the digital revolution has us looking back at that Uniden and laughing. Actually, it's just my kids laughing when I tell them we grew up in a world that didn't include smartphones, downloadable music, and FaceTime. They wonder how we survived.

Christians have always wrestled with the promise and peril of technology. It's both freeing and disruptive, convenient and enslaving. The printed word, for example, changed the way people told oral stories. Highways and railroads transformed the way we organize ourselves in towns and communities. Internet commerce is making our shopping easier and also displacing retail stores.

Today, though, we wrestle with technology more than at any other time in history. The digital revolution is making us think about some very fundamental aspects of our humanity. On the one hand, the act of innovation is an obedience to the mandate God gave to those who are made after his image. Our Creator empowered us to create. And yet we know that because of the fall, our creative gifts can be corrupted. Technology can serve evil ends, some of which we are fully aware, while others are more subtle.

In this issue, we aim to provoke Christians to think deeply about the way we interact with technology. We are not merely

venting about Facebook. Nor are we starry-eyed tech savants who refuse to ask ourselves important questions about the technology we consume. Rather, we want to apply the good news of the gospel—a Creator God who rescues humans from their corrupted endeavors—to the world in which God has called us. And we think the church is the best institution to have these discussions in a world that is asking questions.

Along the way, we feature essays like Jason Thacker's article on the tension of technology and Brett McCracken's on finding margin in a distracted world. We have positive stories on the way technology was used by Billy Graham in the 20th century to proclaim the gospel and how it's

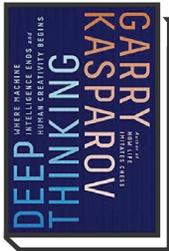
CHRISTIANS HAVE ALWAYS
WRESTLED WITH THE PROMISE
AND PERIL OF TECHNOLOGY.

helping advance Bible translation in the 21st century. We also highlight interviews with innovators like Bobby Gruenewald of YouVersion and author Andy Crouch. Finally, you can evaluate breakthroughs like cryptocurrency and read advice from Chris Martin on how to conduct yourself well on social media.

Ultimately, our desire is to equip Christians to think through how we're using technology and what it's doing to us—even if the devices we utilize today will, one day, be laughed at by future generations.

—DANIEL DARLING

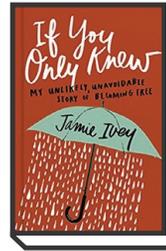
BOOK REVIEWS



Deep Thinking: Where Machine Intelligence Ends and Human Creativity Begins

by GARRY KASPAROV

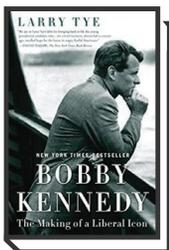
World champion and grandmaster chess player Garry Kasparov played a match against IBM's supercomputer Deep Blue in 1997. The result of that match was a watershed moment in the history of technology. For the first time, a computer program dethroned the reigning world champion and helped usher in the new age of artificial intelligence. In his book, Kasparov recounts the history of computer chess and his virtual competition, while giving an enlightening introduction to the field of artificial intelligence. An unlikely advocate for AI, Kasparov makes a case for technological progress by showing that part of what it means to be human is to be a creative problem-solver, which includes using technology to help us unravel complex societal issues. *Deep Thinking* serves as a great introduction to an ever-changing field. —JASON THACKER



If You Only Knew: My Unlikely, Unavoidable Story of Becoming Free

by JAMIE IVEY

If You Only Knew is the story of Jamie Ivey's journey in her Christian faith—from being brought up in the church, to struggling with sin, to living in a redemptive chapter that the Lord is still writing. Although the book is her story, Ivey helps the reader walk away with a clearer view of how God is working in all of our lives. Most of us would probably agree that at one time or another, we've had the "If you only knew what was really going on with me" thought run through our minds. In her book, Ivey encourages readers to put that thought aside and build community with those around us—a community that reflects who Christ is to each of us, a loving and caring Savior." —AMBER HURM



Bobby Kennedy: The Making of a Liberal Icon

by LARRY TYE

I originally bought Larry Tye's *Bobby Kennedy: The Making of a Liberal Icon* to learn about a historic figure from my parents' generation. What I discovered was a rich narrative about a dynamic individual who, in many ways, was very different from his brothers in his devout Catholicism, love of family, and personal challenges. Of course, as you read the book, you understand where it is ultimately headed—

Bobby Kennedy's assassination in California—and are left wondering what else would have been accomplished in important areas. Perhaps the biggest takeaway was the markedly different political environment surrounding RFK compared to our polarized era. His personal growth came by experience and, many times, he landed in a far different position on an issue from where he started. He could only do that with time. This book made me long for a renewed view of politics in our day as a noble profession and support-worthy public servants who build a record of competent public service.

—BRENT LEATHERWOOD

TOWARD SPIRITUAL VITALITY IN A DIGITAL AGE

A REVIEW OF *12 WAYS YOUR PHONE IS CHANGING YOU* Darla Wilkinson



IT'S SAFE TO SAY that most everyone has opted for a digital lifestyle, either by necessity or by choice. Countless minutes of our day are absorbed with texting, emailing, clicking, liking, and sharing, while Siri and Alexa function as virtual members of our families. The prominent effect of the digital age makes *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* a timely book for people seeking to use their smartphones in ways that pursue God's redemptive purposes in their lives.

Rather than take a strict pro vs. con approach to the use of smartphones (and other digital devices), Tony Reinke gives us an excellent framework to assess how digital habits affect our spiritual health. By pairing 12 warnings with 12 disciplines, he provides a clear path toward spiritual vitality in a technological age. Some of the prevalent, though often unspoken, warnings he discusses include our addiction to distraction, our craving for immediate approval, and the secret vices that grow from unchecked digital practices. And Reinke doesn't shy away from exploring the influence our unbridled smartphone routine can have on relationships with friends and family.

One of the most helpful aspects of the book is Reinke's circumspect approach to the topic. As opposed to assuming a "one-size-fits-all" stance, he consistently accounts

for varied seasons of life, vocational responsibilities, and personal traits that necessarily shape smartphone practices. Yet, there is also accountability with this flexible approach. Reinke faithfully reminds us that the biblical command to love God and love our neighbor, as well as our life callings, are unshakeable realities that dictate our smartphone use, and not vice versa. And he regularly points out the ways digital devices can be strategic tools used by the church.

Perhaps the most surprising and refreshing feature of his book is how Reinke draws the reader into worship. One wouldn't expect this experience from a book about smartphone use. Yet from preface to conclusion, Reinke fills in the portrait of a digital age that occupies a relatively small space in the scope of the great story of salvation—all of which is governed by our eternal, Almighty God. All of the warnings and disciplines are presented not to shame or unnecessarily restrict

REINKE FAITHFULLY REMINDS US THAT THE BIBLICAL COMMAND TO LOVE GOD AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR, AS WELL AS OUR LIFE CALLINGS, ARE UNSHAKEABLE REALITIES THAT DICTATE OUR SMARTPHONE USE, AND NOT VICE VERSA.

us, but to call us to something far better, far greater than the fleeting digital snacks we might otherwise settle for each day. As Reinke holds forth the supreme worth of Christ, one can't help but unplug from problematic habits and engage with the One who satisfies our soul for eternity. ★

DARLA WILKINSON is a trained counselor and women's ministry leader.



I AM NOT MY AVATAR

IDENTITY IN A DIGITAL AGE

Daniel Darling

RECENTLY READ A fascinating book by sociologist Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us*. Twenge studies the latest research on the behavior of the youngest generation, a generation she labels the “iGen”—the first generation to be fully immersed in a world of smartphones, social media, and cheap internet access.

In some ways, the findings are positive. By wide margins, iGen members are less likely to be afflicted with substance abuse, engage in reckless sexual activity, and commit violent crimes.

But, this generation is also more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety, and to admit to deep loneliness.

What seems to explain this is the massive shift in the way iGen interacts with other humans. Today's teens spend, on average, six to eight hours a day in front of a screen, engaging some kind of digital media. They are less likely to hang out with friends (by an hour a week) than the previous generation of millennials; they attend movie theaters with less frequency; and they are less likely to drive. To put it bluntly, today's teens are more connected, but less social.

Here, we see that technological innovation means some problems are lessened, and others are exacerbated (or even created)—increasing isolation, pressure to perform, and stunted growth in developing social skills. There is a reason, for instance, why tech industry giants, who have pioneered these revolutionary devices, are limiting their usage in their own families. Melinda Gates admitted her reluctance to allow her kids unfettered access to the screen. She said, “I spent my career at Microsoft trying to imagine what technology could do, and still I wasn't prepared for smartphones and social media.”¹

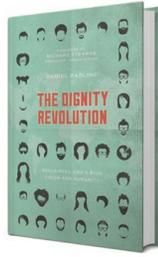
As churches, we need to think hard about how we might address the unique dehumanizing struggles of iGen. And we need to think hard about how technology such as artificial intelligence disrupts the social fabric of our communities.

But, we cannot simply be the people standing athwart

READ MORE

THE DIGNITY REVOLUTION: RECLAIMING GOD'S RICH VISION FOR HUMANITY

Daniel Darling
(London: The Good Book Company, 2018)



technology shouting, “No!” We need to have a positive story to tell about what it means to enjoy being a human made in God’s image and redeemed by God’s Son—and we need to have a positive message about the place of technology within the life we have been created to live.

This requires us to press in on the Bible’s unique vision of humanity in a way that helps us hold our devices loosely and wrestle honestly with technology so that we do not turn our back on our mandate to innovate in order to bless, but equally we take seriously the ways in which we are tempted to turn inward on ourselves in self-worship.

Therefore in some ways we will need to escalate our innovation, and in some ways we will need to de-escalate it. And it means we will need to *think*. All of us have a knee jerk response to new technology—either, “Oh yes, this is tremendous,” or, “Oh no, this is terrible.” Neither should be embraced uncritically. This is especially important in the ways we choose to worship. We should not uncritically embrace what theologian Kevin Van Hoozer calls a “culture of spectacle,” in which:

the church’s imagination is in danger of being captured by spectacular images that owe more to contemporary culture than to Christian faith . . . I believe Scripture sets our imaginations free from the culture of spectacle so that we can see the world as it truly is: a good but fallen creation in which God’s kingdom is advancing in mysterious and often quite unspectacular ways.²

So perhaps the great antidote to the dehumanizing aspects of new technologies stares us in the face every Sunday. Our worship gatherings may be the most analog experience people have all week. This may be why we might need to emphasize the embodied experienced of corporate worship. Jesus told us that his presence is most pronounced “when two or three are gathered” in person, together as his body. And in an individualistic society so easily disembodied and

disconnected by media, we possess in the local church the life-giving experience of biblical community.

Church is where we experience real community, shoulder to shoulder and not FaceTime or Skype. There, we are known as we really are, challenged when we need it, forgiven and spurred on. There, we don’t need to put on a front, or pretend. There we find a community of grace that we can rely on and contribute to, in place of a virtual community of performance and perfection that exhausts the soul.

Church as the gathered embodied, physical presence of God’s people has something to offer a world, increasingly isolated in digital tribes. This is where we celebrate a meal together, physically raising the bread and the cup to our lips in celebration of our status as God’s redeemed image-bearers. It is where we sit down next to and stand to sing with and kneel to pray alongside those who are different than us in age, in viewpoint, in personality type.

Think about the stunning simplicity of it all: the cure for our digital identity crisis and dehumanizing

smartphone-worship might be to do the simple and analog act of going to church.

This ethos on Sundays can then flow into the rest of our weeks, helping us form the spiritual habits we need to inform the rest of our weeks and giving us a healthy grid through which we both employ and enjoy our devices, and separate from and cease to rely upon our devices.

So the cure, then, from digital enslavement and for dignity restoration happens in our local congregation. The action takes place in a nondescript auditorium, and the media will send no one to cover your worship. But this is where, every Sunday, you reconnect with your humanity because you worship the God who formed you in his image in the midst of the community that he saved you to belong to. It’s where the repeated rhythms of prayer, communion, and song form you for life in the world. The local church may not grip the news cycle, but it is where we learn to live as real people, producing technology, enjoying and using technology, but not being dominated or shaped by it. ★

¹ “Melinda Gates: I Spent My Career in Technology. I Wasn’t Prepared for Its Effect on My Kids.” - *The Washington Post*, accessed September 29, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/08/24/melinda-gates-i-spent-my-career-in-technology-i-wasnt-prepared-for-its-effect-on-my-kids/?utm_term=.60a8ed6f7d8f.

² “Discipleship in the Age of the Spectacle,” *Desiring God*, April 2, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/discipleship-in-the-age-of-the-spectacle>.

DANIEL DARLING is the vice president of communications at the ERLC.



PASTORING IN LIGHT OF TECHNOLOGY

SHEPHERDING SOULS SHAPED BY SCREENS

Trevor Atwood

“**THE GLORY OF GOD** is a human being fully alive. Moreover, the life of man consists in beholding God.”
—St. Irenaeus

Our social media use, smartphone addictions, and television-binging sessions are changing us—and not for the better. In fact, we can find plenty of blog posts, articles, statistics, and news reports through those same devices that testify to the reality that we are losing basic relational skills, like empathy and communication.

Human relationship in the context of community is central to what it means to “love one another” and display the image of God. When we lose this, we lose a primary way of beholding God himself. Using Irenaeus’ logic, therefore, we lose “the life of man”—we are no longer “fully alive.”

If we take our calling as pastors seriously, we ought to think deeply about leading people to engage faithfully with technology without losing the necessary and loving engagement with other human beings we were made for.

So, here are three things that pastors can teach and practice that will help our churches *use* technology, rather than be *used by* technology, and ultimately, behold God more than our devices.

1 TEACH AND PRACTICE HOSPITALITY

Our God is serious about hospitality. The Old Testament displays God’s heart to provide a home for the sojourner. In Psalm 23, God as the Good Shepherd “prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies.” And the New Testament is replete with commands to “practice hospitality.”

Of the eight people that live in my house, three of them don't share my last name. They are young adults who come from non-believing or divorced homes, and they all spent too much time in front of screens. Most nights, my wife, my three kids, and the three of them sit around the dinner table and talk. We break up fights between our kids, tell funny stories, ask hard questions, and say things we have to apologize for. But, there is never a TV on or a phone at the table.

Breaking bread together without the manufactured distraction of a screen is one of the most human things we can do. It's a daily break in the ever-present call from technology. It slows the day down and makes everyone practice listening, talking, and responding to each other. Hospitality humanizes us by pushing us into community, not for entertaining guests, but to turn our homes from being fortresses of isolation, to hostels of discipleship.

2 TEACH AND PRACTICE THE SABBATH

With technology, we barely have to stop working. We can send a message at any time to anyone we know. And we can seemingly be anywhere and know anything we want with just a few taps.

Technology makes an insidious promise of being "god," much like the serpent in Genesis 3. When he tempted the woman, he awoke the craving for the incommunicable, or unshared, attributes of God while conveniently ignoring the image of God already displayed in humans.

The same story plays out in our lives today. We reject those good, hard things that display the image of God in us—love, compassion, and empathy—which are the ways he intends for us to imitate him. Instead, we chase after omniscience, omnipresence, and unimpeded power—all of which distort his image in us and cause us to distort his image in others.

This is why the Sabbath is such a beautiful gift from God. It forces us to stop and admit we aren't God while we practice all the ways we are supposed to be like him. The Sabbath reminds us that the world won't stop if we don't respond to

an email or a text in the next 15 minutes. It reminds us that we need God more than we need anyone or anything. Practicing the Sabbath is an act of humility and trust.

3 KEEP THE DEEP STUFF FACE TO FACE

A few years ago, I noticed that I was revealing more to my wife about my thoughts and feelings through text than I was face to face. It was almost like the people we were in our phones were different than the people we were in person.

Neil Postman, in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, warned that the medium we use to communicate changes the message. When I was communicating deeply with my wife through text, the "me" in the phone started to become more connected to her than the "me" in the flesh.

Social media allows us to develop connections that aren't real. We can say things into echo chambers without looking another person in the eye. It produces a false sense of security; safe behind a screen, we get to choose whether we want to face the consequences of our political rants, dogmatic parenting

"advice," or condemning theological positions. We don't have to see the hurt or humanity in another person's eyes. We lose empathy, understanding, and a sense of risk.

So, the deepest truths, as much as possible, should be communicated in the flesh. For example, our pastoral leadership does not counsel through text or email. Like our Savior, who is the Word made flesh, we want to be an embodiment of his glory to the families, church, and communities he has entrusted to us.

Technology isn't evil. Yet, as with all that we create, there is an evil twist that beckons us to "be like a god" and reject the *Imago Dei*. As humans, and even more so as Christians, our diagnostic question regarding all technology should echo Ireneaus: "Am I beholding God with this device? And will it help me to be fully alive?" ★

HOSPITALITY HUMANIZES US BY
PUSHING US INTO COMMUNITY, NOT FOR
ENTERTAINING GUESTS, BUT TO TURN
OUR HOMES FROM BEING FORTRESSES OF
ISOLATION, TO HOSTELS OF DISCIPLESHIP.

TREVOR ATWOOD is the lead pastor of City Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.



PREACHING BEYOND THE STADIUM

BILLY GRAHAM'S USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR EVANGELISM

Benjamin B. Phillips

“**FAITH COMES BY HEARING**, and hearing by the Word of Christ . . . But how will they hear without a preacher?” Romans asks. This urgency of the gospel message drove the apostles to preach to all who would listen. Yet, the voice of 12 men could only reach a limited number of ears. So they trained other preachers, like Timothy and Titus.

But the apostles also took advantage of the technology available to them—the scroll and the pen—to “preach” to others in places where they were not present. These sermons, written to be read aloud in churches, became the New Testament epistles.

The canon of Scripture is closed, but the challenge remains: How can we extend the voice of gospel preachers beyond their physical presence?

The greatest innovator in the art of preaching to those not present was Billy Graham. His ministry took advantage of nearly every significant communications development of the 20th century—news-papers, magazines, radio, television, movies, and the internet—to cast the seed of the gospel as broadly as possible.

BILLY GRAHAM'S RISE TO PROMINENCE

Billy Graham rose to prominence after his 1949 Los Angeles crusade, quickly leading to the idea of a national radio program. Graham decided to commit to the project if the necessary \$25,000 was raised in one night, a condition fulfilled at his 1950 Portland, Oregon, crusade. Appropriate management of these funds required the creation of a nonprofit organization. So, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) was born.

“The Hour of Decision” radio broadcast launched in November 1950. Soon, Graham started a nationally syndicated newspaper column called “My Answer.” He would also help found the magazines “Christianity Today” (1956) and the BGEA’s own “Decision” (1957). Both the radio broadcast and the print ministry took advantage of technologies that were “tried-and-true” for evangelicals.

But Billy Graham was just getting started.

BILLY GRAHAM AND THE TV

Graham’s greatest ministry-technology breakthrough was with television. He produced a 30-minute program also called “The Hour of Decision,” which ran from 1951–1954 on the ABC network. This program laid the foundation for Graham’s use of TV during the 1957 New York Madison Square Garden Crusade, which opened on May 15, 1957. A weeknight

TV program, “Insights,” carried reports from the services. But on June 1, ABC carried the last hour of the Saturday evening service live. The arena held 18,000 people, but that first national TV broadcast reached an estimated 6.5 million viewers.

Using live TV to preach the gospel required a new way of receiving responses to the invitation. Both the “Insight” program and the national broadcasts invited people to call the crusade’s telephone counseling ministry. There, they were able to speak to counselors trained in personal evangelism and were referred to local churches for follow-up. The “call center” became a key feature of the infrastructure supporting Graham’s evangelistic use of TV.

Graham’s live TV ministry peaked with the 1995 crusade in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the 1996 Billy Graham World Television Series. The San Juan services were simulcast via satellite in 48 languages all over the world, reaching millions. The 1996 television series reached 200 nations in 50 languages. As a result, an estimated 1.5 billion people heard Graham preach on a single day, with an estimated 2.5 billion reached by the end of the month-long series.

BILLY GRAHAM AND MOVIES

Another major aspect of Billy Graham’s use of visual media was the production of evangelistic movies, originally to be shown in churches. Early films, such as “Mr. Texas” (1952), told stories of skeptics, sinners, and seekers, culminating in footage from Graham crusades with which the stories were associated. “Mr. Texas” drew from the 1951 Fort Worth, Texas, crusade. Other films were tied to the London (1954), New York (1957), and Australia (1959) crusades.

In 1965, the BGEA shifted to a movie theater strategy. Graham’s first feature-length movie, “The Restless Ones,” depicted teen troubles with peer pressure, dating, and drugs. The film ended with

GRAHAM'S MINISTRY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF NEARLY EVERY SIGNIFICANT COMMUNICATIONS DEVELOPMENT OF THE 20TH CENTURY TO CAST THE SEED OF THE GOSPEL AS BROADLY AS POSSIBLE.

footage of Graham preaching the gospel, and when the house lights rose a live speaker gave an invitation. Graham’s strategy followed his crusade model, training and deploying live decision teams with each film. In the long run, this was difficult to sustain, so later BGEA films gave the invitation as part of the movie.

Remaining faithful to their evangelistic mission while generating fresh interest also presented a unique challenge to the ministry’s filmmakers. In response, they chose to vary the genre of their movies, ultimately making 33 movies including westerns, love stories, comedies, adventures, and historical films. Graham’s greatest success was “The Hiding Place” (1975), based on the story of Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Christian who was imprisoned in a Nazi death camp for hiding Jews. Jeannette Clift was nominated for a Golden Globe for playing the lead role.

In the mid-1990s the ministry again shifted its strategy, producing made-for-TV movies and direct-to-video projects. One such movie was “The Ride” (1997), a cowboy film shown in Graham’s quarterly time slot on national TV. It earned a larger audience and a higher decision rate than Graham’s televised sermons from the previous quarter. Taken together, the BGEA claims over 2 million first-time decisions for Christ as a result of its various movie projects.

BILLY GRAHAM AND THE INTERNET

Despite innovations in the use of mass-media technology spanning nearly 50 years, Graham’s ministry continued to

embrace new means of communication. In 1996, the BGEA launched its website, BillyGraham.org. It continues to make Graham’s sermons, materials, and movies available to the world.

Most significantly, it is the hub for the BGEA’s “My Hope” campaign of home-based evangelism events. This strategy provides access to evangelistic training online, downloadable and printable promotional materials, and evangelistic videos. Its purpose is to equip churches and families to share the gospel in home settings, mixing the power of video with personal relationships. Coordinated campaigns using this approach have resulted in more than 10 million people worldwide making decisions for Christ.

Billy Graham was probably the greatest “in-person” preacher of the 20th century. But the impact of his evangelistic ministry cannot be measured by stadium seating capacities alone. Graham took full advantage of nearly every possible way to preach where he could not be present. That ministry continues today.

The number of people who will hear Graham preach in person has been reached—tens of millions of souls, which is more than any preacher reached before him. Yet, the number who have heard him through his use of mass-media technology reaches into the billions, and will continue to grow until Christ returns. ★

BENJAMIN B. PHILLIPS is an associate dean and professor at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's Houston campus.



THE BIBLE AS AN APP

One man's quest to have everyone engaging with Scripture

Lindsay Nicolet

THE BEST IDEAS HAPPEN when we least expect it. At least, that was the case for Bobby Gruenewald in the fall of 2006 while standing in a long TSA line at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.

"For whatever reason," he said, "that particular day in the security line I was processing [this], 'I wonder if there is

a way that I could leverage technology to help me engage with the Bible? And perhaps, if I could, maybe it would help others as well.'"

As is the case for many Christians, Gruenewald had always struggled to consistently interact with Scripture. With a background in entrepreneurship, it's no surprise he

had an idea about how to tackle this challenge. And with a specialty in technology, it only makes sense that this vision would eventually involve the thing that most humans are never more than a few feet away from—the smartphone.

YOUVERSION WAS BORN

In that TSA line, the idea for YouVersion was born. It's an app available on any smartphone or tablet, and it contains more than 1,700 versions of the Bible in more than 1,200 languages. It has a wide array of features including the Verse of the Day, Bookmarks, Highlights, Notes Bible Plans, Plans with Friends, audio versions of the Bible, sharable Verse Images, a community aspect for shared engagement, and more.

According to Gruenewald, "YouVersion is basically a digital tool to help people engage [with] Scripture."

But it didn't start out as an app, nor was it a "success." Initially, the idea for YouVersion was a website, Bible.com. But, for Gruenewald, the features weren't ones that helped him naturally connect with the Bible.

"So, basically, the first idea for YouVersion was a failure."

Isn't that where all good stories begin, though?

YOUVERSION BECOMES AN APP

The initial concept for YouVersion was on the verge of being shut down in 2008. The website didn't have a good mobile component, which was a large part of the problem. So, the team redesigned a mobile-friendly version with small, simple changes that Gruenewald found made all the difference.

The timing of that change, as many say, was everything.

"Apple announced, at that same time, they were going to make it possible to develop apps for the iPhone and that

they were going to create something called an App Store," he recalled. So, his team developed an app called "Bible" for the new store in order to further the benefit of the mobile website. It's now known interchangeably as YouVersion—which was the initial name Gruenewald came up with at the airport—because it just caught on.

"The App Store launched in July 2008, and The Bible App, YouVersion, was among the very first 200 apps that were available the day that the App Store launched."

That was on a Thursday. From Thursday to Sunday, they saw 83,000 people download The Bible App—represented by a Bible icon—and actually utilize it. As a result, Gruenewald's team reallocated resources and decided this was something they needed to give attention to full time.

"It started as an effort for me to try to figure out how to use technology to help me engage in the Bible—an effort that actually didn't work but led us to an idea that God took and really ran with," Gruenewald said, as he reflected on YouVersion's beginning.

YOUVERSION'S AMAZING REACH

Gruenewald and his team are continually amazed at how they see God using this app. As of the day of our interview, 315 million unique devices had installed The Bible App.

"And it is growing by about four million new devices every month."

Even more amazing is that most of the app's growth is outside of North America. "We have a lot of growth happening—I mean triple-digit growth happening—in many, many regions of the world [like] India, Russia, Syria, Central Africa, Brazil," Gruenewald pointed out.

In fact, "it has been used in every single country and territory on earth."

The YouVersion team has been able to see firsthand how digital distribution and the growth of mobile technology has meant "that the Bible has been able to slip right over the borders of places that people have been trying to smuggle [it] into for years," as Gruenewald put it. And there's a great irony in how this feat is being accomplished.

"Many of these countries want to advance their mobile technology and feel this is a high priority for their country," he explained, "so much so that they didn't realize they brought along with it things that they have been trying to keep out—the Scripture being the most important of those."

The YouVersion team is humbled that the app is being accessed in places where people have lost their lives for the sake of the Word.

"GOD HAS PLACED US AT THIS MOMENT
IN HISTORY WHEN ALL OF THESE
PEOPLE ARE ALIVE, AND HE HAS PUT US
IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THERE ARE
TOOLS AND THE POTENTIAL TO REACH
THOSE PEOPLE WITH THE GOSPEL."

-Bobby Gruenewald

YOUVERSION HIGHLIGHTS TECHNOLOGY'S POTENTIAL

The mission of Gruenewald's team is literally a direct result of the local church. The team's employer is also their church home, Life.Church. Yet, the app isn't used as a tool to promote their congregation. Instead, it's a natural overflow of the ministry Life.Church has already been doing.

"For many years, our church has really had the desire to figure out how we can use new tools and new methods to help connect people to the gospel," Gruenewald recounted.

This is especially true of technology. In fact, one of the pastors on staff helped Gruenewald consider the possibility that he could use his technological gifts and skills to serve the church.

"I spent hours and hours at the church serving, and in spite of all that I never—not a single time—thought that what I did with technology had applications inside the church."

His pastor's encouragement and insight was invaluable.

Though many churches can be skeptical about technology because of its potential dangers, which Gruenewald encourages being thoughtful and careful about, he takes a view similar to his pastor's.

"I feel like God has placed us here at this moment in history when all of these people are alive, and he has also put us in an environment where there are tools and the potential to reach those people with the gospel."

Because of this mindset at Life.Church, what began as an individual's idea and a tool for their congregation has turned into a global movement.

YOUVERSION'S SUCCESS

So, what made Gruenewald's idea so successful?

"We attribute it to [God] completely," Gruenewald said, "but we definitely are always trying to make adjustments. And oftentimes, what are our plans—like that initial website, as an example—are not necessarily the things that work. But when we simply look at what [God] is already using, already doing, those have tended to be where we see the most significant results."

"If there is a secret sauce to it, that has probably been [it]," he quipped.

For example, the YouVersion team is getting ready to unveil a new app to aid in their mission. This app will build upon

something that's already a part of YouVersion called Verse Images, where people share pictures with Scripture on them. The new app will help people connect the Word to their everyday lives by allowing them to pick any image—a new or existing one—and the app will apply Scripture to it by identifying objects within that picture and picking a corresponding verse to overlay on top of it.

To go a step further, the team wants to "redeem the selfie" by emphasizing with Scripture the importance of what God thinks about individuals when they upload an image, instead of what their peers think.

The team is excited about the potential of this new endeavor, especially because the verse images are well-received already, being shared about 350,000 times per day.

CONCLUSION

Gruenewald and his team never expected to be a part of something so vast. Though their vision started out small in comparison, God expanded it far beyond what they could have

asked or imagined. As a result, Gruenewald said their faith has grown, and they've learned to dream bigger because of what they've seen, believing that 315 million users could turn into a billion, and that YouVersion could be the type of tool God uses to help transform, not just this generation, but generations to come for his kingdom.

However it's used, the team's ultimate desire is to see people engaging with Scripture, whether through their app or another's idea.

The man standing in the TSA line in 2006 wasn't trying to be a success. And the church that worked so hard to expound on his vision wasn't trying to be known as a pioneer. Neither could have envisioned how God would use their dreams, desires, and efforts.

"I think God chose to use a church in Oklahoma and a group of people that are not necessarily known for being the leaders in technology," Gruenewald reflected, "because it lets himself be known in the story, and not us. We can't claim it was our abilities or our knowledge or our depth of experience that made this happen. It [is] completely something he has done." ★

THE TEAM'S ULTIMATE DESIRE IS
TO SEE PEOPLE ENGAGING WITH
SCRIPTURE, WHETHER THROUGH
THEIR APP OR ANOTHER'S IDEA.

LINDSAY NICOLET is the managing editor of content at the ERLC.



Technology as a Tool

How to Teach Our Children
to Use Screens With Wisdom

AN INTERVIEW WITH JULIE MASSON AND DORENA WILLIAMSON

Daniel Darling



How should today's parents be thinking when it comes to digital technology, especially smartphones? And how can they wisely approach the extremes of being fearful of technology and being careless with technology?

Julie Masson: Parents today need to realize that technology is not just something to be aware of, but rather it is something that is pivotal to our lives. For example, our teenagers will likely have teachers request that they download a certain app to be used in the classroom. So, if we continue to see technology as something that is purely evil, we will miss out on the practical way our society uses technology. Banning our children from ever using it may actually hinder them more than it will protect them.

On the other hand, we need to be aware of the dangers that come with technology, and in particular, smartphones. They give our children instant access to the world and to their friends (and strangers). One of the worst things we can do as a parent is to simply hand over a smartphone and let them loose.

Our children need to be taught how to use technology properly. Just like we teach our teenagers how to drive by sitting in the passenger seat and coaching them around that

first turn, we need to sit down with our children and show them how to “drive” a smartphone.

We need to explain the various social media apps and how we use them. We should show our kids interactions we have on social media so they can ask questions. We must give a lesson on digital “stranger danger” and help our children know what’s OK to share online and what’s not (your address, your school, your job, etc.). And we have to set boundaries that help protect them from danger.

Dorena Williamson: I believe that looking at technology as a tool can be very helpful. Each generation tends to wish things were “the way it used to be,” because it takes effort to embrace change. Technology progresses and shifts as it should, and there are some beneficial ways it can be utilized: As a tool of better communication, connectivity, research, and learning. We must constantly turn our worry about it into prayer and proceed in good works infused with faith.

Our family approaches access to technology as a privilege—that most people in the world do not have—that should be utilized with the constant companion of wisdom. I believe we should give age-appropriate instruction and warning to our kids. Proverbs lays out both the benefits of good choices and the consequences of bad choices, which is an excellent way to approach our families’ standards with everything, including technology.

There’s a lot of pressure on parents to give their kids phones, particularly smartphones, at younger ages. How do they resist this pressure?

JM: Our children are 10, 8, and 6. We haven’t landed on what age we will allow them to have a smartphone, but we do know that we will likely start with a “dumb” phone or get them a watch that allows calling to four predetermined numbers. It’s important to discuss these things with your spouse and other peers because there are no easy answers.

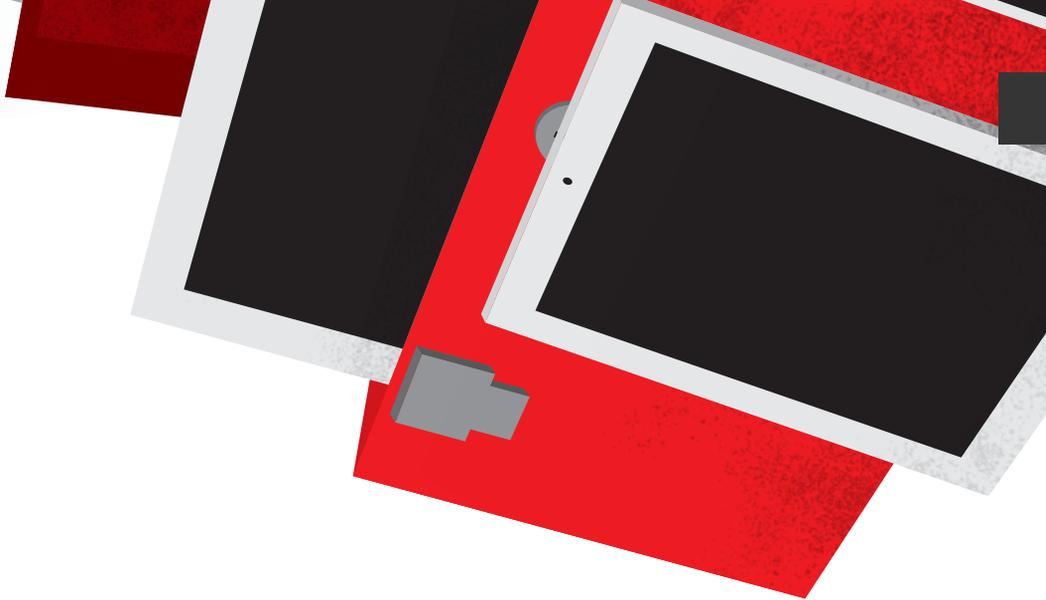
The questions my husband and I are currently thinking about regarding smartphone usage are: When will they need a phone for more than just calling or texting to let us know

JULIE MASSON

is the digital marketing and social media strategist for the ERLC.

DORENA WILLIAMSON

is a pastor’s wife, mom, speaker, and author.



their practice is over and need a ride home? When we think they *are* in need of this, should we pay for it? Or should they buy the phone and the monthly plan with their own money? Or vice versa?

DW: I try to keep the big picture before my kids, who now range from 14 to 24 years old: comparing ourselves to other people will always make us feel better or less than. And neither is the truth. We shouldn't respond to peers with pride or dejection because we do or don't have the latest phone. Someone will always have the latest thing before we do. It's not easy, but I think we can keep reminding our

children (and ourselves) of the “why,” and build understanding that will serve them later on.

We must also resist judging others for their reality and technological needs. Fewer people opt to have landlines, and, a single parent navigating custody may need their younger tween to have a phone. Or, a working parent may need to hear that their child's practice ended early.

In your view, is there an ideal age to give kids a smartphone?

JM: I think that depends on the family and the child. If we had a child that was travelling for sports on weekends, we would at least send them with a flip phone. But I really can't imagine a scenario when our young children would need a smartphone.

Determining when to give our children a smartphone should, in part, be based on how much time we are willing to invest in teaching our children the proper way to use it. We need to make time to explain the benefits and disadvantages of using a smartphone. We should also have rules and expectations in place. If we don't have expectations in place and we don't have time to sit down with our children to explain how to use a smartphone, we may not be ready to give our children one.

DW: I don't think there is an ideal age. Just as some kids are responsible enough to be left at home alone at an earlier age, some kids can be trusted with technology at younger ages than others. My mantra was “a phone is primarily for communication,” and that guided our “when.” We used the phone as a way to teach trust, maturity, and wise choices. They earned it, and they lost it.

—

“IF WE DON'T HAVE EXPECTATIONS
IN PLACE AND WE DON'T HAVE TIME
TO SIT DOWN WITH OUR CHILDREN TO
EXPLAIN HOW TO USE A SMARTPHONE,
WE MAY NOT BE READY TO GIVE
OUR CHILDREN ONE.”

—JULIE MASSON

→ We found that when our young teen started getting more involved in sports, we needed more communication than, “Use Mrs. Jones’ phone to call us.” That varied with each child. With some extracurricular activities and team sports, it’s more streamlined for the coach to mass communicate with the athletes, and that started for us in middle school.

So generally, when our children are spending more time in activities and a phone can help with communication, that’s a good time to get one, though it doesn’t have to be a smartphone.

What is your advice on limiting screen time?

JM: We need to have a plan. We will only frustrate our kids if we say yes to screen time sometimes, and no other times simply because of how we feel that day. Decide how much time you will allow your kids to be on screens, and then talk to your kids about those rules.

Our family has various screen time rules. Our children can only play the Wii on weekends, and only after their chores are done. We keep an eye on how long they have been on it. We allow computer time once a week while I teach one child how to cook. I have restrictions set so that the only websites they can go to are educational sites I’ve pre-selected.

Also, my 10 year old has her own Nook, and she can be on certain apps (YouTube Kids, for example) for up to 30 minutes per day. We use the Circle with Disney device to help manage how much time she can spend on her Nook.

Device restrictions plus communicating a plan really help keep the frustrations to a minimum. Our kids know what our expectations are regarding screen time, so there

is far less arguing about when and what they can do on devices.

DW: Remembering that technology is a tool, and phones should be primarily for communication, is a huge help.

How can parents model, for their kids, the wise use of technology?

JM: This is perhaps the best question to ask ourselves. I can put restrictions on my kids’ devices, limit screen time, and clearly communicate the rules, but if all they see is me looking at my phone, I will have failed. I have to be the one to show them that my smartphone can be a helpful tool, not an idol. I have to show them that conversation with them is more important than whatever is happening on my social media feed at the moment.

For someone like me, who loves to be in communication with the rest of the world through my own smartphone, this is very hard. I’ve had to apologize to my kids for not paying attention to them when they were talking to me. I’ve had to set certain times during my day when I don’t check my phone. During those times, usually before school and the hour after they get home, I plug my phone in and put it on DND (Do Not Disturb).

Whatever our system is, we need to figure out ways to let our kids know that they are far more important than our phones. This has to be intentional, and it has to be strategically thought through. We can’t wing this aspect of our parenting.

DW: As in all areas, we should remember that more is caught than taught, so wisdom should be our companion in using technology as a tool.

We should engage with our children when we are face to face with them. And as we live and love those God has entrusted us with, we can look for ways to use technology as a point of connection. For example, my family loves to use The Bible App to discuss the verse for the day, Twitter to talk about the news that's trending, or the computer to look up our next dream vacation together. One of our children lives

technology for good and ways people are using it for harm. I believe this helps them think through how they can use technology for a bigger purpose.

DW: We have used computers and phones with our children to build trust. We ask questions about what messages movies and television shows communicate. It often bugs my kids, but

“WE USED THE PHONE AS A WAY TO TEACH TRUST, MATURITY,
AND WISE CHOICES. THEY EARNED IT, AND THEY LOST IT.”

-DORENA WILLIAMSON

out of state, so FaceTiming provides an amazing way for her to join our family time.

As parents we are called to prepare our children to live on mission in a digital world while being wary of the dangers. How can we do this well?

JM: YouTube is the preferred medium of our children's generation. So, when my daughter tells me about a channel she likes, I watch it with her. We like to watch various YouTube videos as a family and then talk about them. I'll ask questions about something they observed in the video and try and apply it back to what we know to be true—that we were made to glorify God, that all humans are made in the image of God, etc.

So, I think the key here is to simply talk about technology to our children. Talk about ways people are using

it also makes them think critically. I'm focused on preparing them for living without me and making God-honoring decisions that lead to a beneficial life.

Because I tend to be slow in learning how to use gadgets and upgrades, my teens help me learn. But in conversing together, I am able to get access into how they process the messages they take in and, as a result, teach them as they coach me. I remind them of our family standards—why we think this limitation or that allowance is important.

This digital age has countless opportunities for career paths and areas of ministry that require expertise. So, we can use technology to challenge our kids' thinking and, perhaps, even guide them toward their God-given purpose. ★

DANIEL DARLING is the vice president of communications at the ERLC.



THE TECH-WISE FAMILY

A Conversation with
**Russell Moore and
Andy Crouch** about
Parenting and Technology

RUSSELL MOORE: One of the top questions that I get from parents is navigating technology, whether that is smartphones, social media, or television time. That's why I wanted to talk with my friend, Andy Crouch. He is the author of a magnificent book called *The Tech-Wise Family:*

Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place.

I specifically like this book because it is not a Luddite rejection of technology; it is not a shaming book for parents who may have too much technology in their lives or their children's lives. You won't read this book and have someone

screaming at you. What you will have is good, practical wisdom and counsel.

Andy, you talk about the use of nudges in our lives and how smartphone technology, especially, has kind of moved us into a tyranny of nudges. What do you mean by that?

ANDY CROUCH: Yes, the tyranny of the notification—that little buzz in your pocket or blip of audio that says, “Pay attention to me.” I think of nudges as small things that steer us in a certain direction—either a beneficial direction or a direction that’s really distracting. We know how distracting these notifications can be for us as adults, let alone for kids. When you think about all of those nudges that technology provides, I think it is a problem.

On the other hand, what I suggest in the book is that we can build in healthy nudges. We can make some choices about the way we shape the space we live in and the way we use our time—certain times of day where we actually nudge ourselves toward a more healthy use of technology that’s not at the expense of being present with other people in the real world.

RM: Sometimes when people talk about technology as it relates to family life, all they are really talking about is porn or dangerous situations with people on the other end of the internet. But you give a great deal of attention to many other things. One of the primary things that you talk about is the relationship to time. I was especially interested in the sorts of ways that you and your household have tried to redeem time from the smartphone. Can you give some counsel for people who are trying to figure that out?

AC: Well, one of the real challenges about our whole technological age, much deeper than screens and computers, is that everything is always on. The power grid is always on, the telephone is always there, and machines can run 24/7. In fact, many machines run at their best if they are on all the time. It is hard to shut it all down, and it is really hard to shut down our world of Wi-Fi and cellphone and cell data and so forth.

Over against that, we have this fundamental commandment at the heart of the Bible to imitate God in having this rhythm of work and rest in the way that we structure our time. Human beings cannot run 24/7. We need sleep every day, which is, I think, one of the most perplexing and humbling things about being a creature like we are.

So, our family has decided we need to be serious about a couple of things with these always-on devices. Basically, we need to do the thing they are *not* designed to do easily, and that is turn them all off. We do that one hour a day, one day a week, and at least one week a year.

Also, we realized we need to be careful about bedtime and morning. We did some research for this book, and over 80 percent of parents sleep with a phone next to them, a similar number for teenagers, and a little less for younger kids. So, we’ve started putting our devices to bed before we go to bed.

Actually, the bigger discipline for me is when I get up in the morning. I grew up before all of this technology was so readily available. I remember getting up in the morning and praying. What a thought! Now what do I do? I walk downstairs, and the first thing I am inclined to do is pick up my phone and see whatever nudges have come in.

I really want to reclaim that morning time. What I’ve started to do is walk outside every morning before I will let anything glow at me. I just open the door no matter what and feel the air before I immerse myself in this technological world.

RM: You mentioned the guide that you all have [for age] is no screens before double digits of time. I thought that was a helpful way to put it.

AC: [One] dimension of time is human growth and development. I think it is short-sighted to have our children spend a lot of time with screens before they are at least 10 because, honestly, we are all going to spend the rest of our lives staring at these things. I spend a huge amount of my life with this rectangle glowing at me, and childhood, especially the early years of childhood, is this time when we are absolutely wired for three-dimensional, full-body, full-contact engagement with the world and all its sights, sounds, smells, and experiences.

To have our kids already chained to those devices is robbing them of the unique moments of those single-digit years that they will never get back. [Their] brain will never be the same; it will never be as open to experience and learning. [They] have the rest of [their lives] to swipe back and forth on a screen, but [they] don’t have the rest of [their lives] to be a child.

RM: I laughed out loud when I came across the section on boredom because it was right after I was talking to my wife and said that I desperately needed time to be bored. What I meant by that was, so often, the ideas that come to me

tend to happen in some situation where there is nothing going on. You have an entire section in your book on boredom as a good thing. How do you convince a 10 year old that it is a good thing to be bored?

AC: Our parenting philosophy was: Some things I can't convince you of, but they are still true, and we are still going to act on them. I think there are two sides to boredom. I think boredom is, in a way, a sign of what I would call frustrated image-bearing. We are meant to

be creative, and we get bored when we are in situations or in environments that don't seem to allow for creativity. Our reaction is to feel a sense of frustration.

But there is another sense in which it is actually the quiet and the waiting out of which real image-bearing creativity emerges. We need to convey to our kids that on the other side of this frustration is something really amazing that they won't experience if we just solve their problem of being bored. The great danger about our devices now is that they always offer to solve our boredom problem.

RM: You talk about the use of one technology to combat some of these others, and that technology is the car. I think there are a lot of parents for whom their car experience is: let's get in the car, put on your headphones, and retreat into wherever. But you've got a different prescription for them.

AC: I think car time is the most astonishing time. It is the closest, physically,

you are to each other. This is why we are all tempted to turn on those devices, because it is challenging to be that close to your family members, especially if it is a longer ride.

In our family we set up this rule: Car time is conversation time. When we get in the car, it is a chance to talk. Sherry Turkle, who has written some important books about technology and its affect on

HUMAN BEINGS CANNOT RUN 24/7. WE NEED SLEEP EVERY DAY, WHICH IS, I THINK, ONE OF THE MOST PERPLEXING AND HUMBLING THINGS ABOUT BEING A CREATURE LIKE WE ARE.

relationships, says in her book, *Reclaiming Conversation*, that every conversation hits a decision point at about the seven minute mark, which is about as long as you can do small talk. Someone has to take a risk. The beautiful thing about car rides is you have a chance to get to that seven minute mark and move beyond it.

This was the great upside surprise to me. I was dreading driving places with my kids. I never expected that a great sense of loss would happen when each of our kids got their driver's licenses. Now they can drive themselves, and we no longer have these conversation opportunities. It ended up being some of the richest times we have had as parents and children.

RM: You talk awhile in the book about where the drive toward pornography comes from and how we can combat it. What I liked about that is you weren't just putting hedges around the porn. You were really getting at why people are driven to porn. I'm sure we have people reading this right now who are

in this endless pattern of porn— feeling horrible, feeling shame, back into the porn, and the cycle just keeps going. What would your counsel for them be?

AC: I don't go into a lot of detail, but that's part of my own story as an adult. It's part of almost everybody's story, because I think it is actually the technological culture applied to our deepest

need and desire, which is for union with another. Ultimately, it's a pointer toward our drive for union with God. The technological culture says there is a

way to have a good enough simulation of this, and it creates the cycle of addiction. Really, all addiction is a quest for a sense of power and connection. So, in the book I try to say we are never going to be able to filter that. There is no internet filter strong enough to remove that powerful need.

RM: Not that we shouldn't employ internet filters.

AC: No. The example I use in the book is the city of Beijing, a very polluted, major metropolitan area. If you go out on the street, you should absolutely wear a mask. On the most polluted days, you should use all kinds of measures to minimize your exposure, but that is in no way going to address the underlying source of the addiction, right?

I think the deeper thing here is that technology has allowed us to acquire certain kinds of power that don't involve relationship. And all true forms of power come from relationship. They come from intimacy and connectedness



with other people. So the real way out, in a sense, of all of these distortions that technology brings is a deeper connection with the real world, with the God who made the real world, and with other people. The more I have daily satisfying contexts of connection, the less powerful that simulation is in attracting and seducing me into this very isolated, distorted use of technological power. For me, it's all about reclaiming a

connection with my wife, children, the real world, and good embodied experience, rather than the thin options that present themselves to me.

RM: I find that a lot of people assume that what happens is a marriage goes bad, and then the porn starts. I tend to find it works in reverse. One of the things that I've noticed in church life is that when I've seen a man or a group

of men going through unemployment, there is almost always a spiritual warfare going on driving toward porn. This is what you are arguing: When a life doesn't seem to be full, that's when you are really in peril.

AC: Absolutely, and we have embraced individualism. The isolation we all live with is made possible by technology, and not just digital technology. The car

isolates us if we are driving alone. The phone isolates us because we can have conversations without being present to each other in the same way we would be if we were together.

Compound all of these isolations that technology makes possible and profitable, and it leaves us vulnerable to thin simulations that restore to us some sense of connection, even though it is not really true. This is not just porn. It is also liking things on Instagram and reacting to things on Twitter. All of these are thin versions of what we are actually made for.

RM: What are some things parents can do to try to minimize their children's exposure to pornography?

AC: There are two things, as well as all of the obvious means of filtering

your home internet and so forth. The "easy" one is that we have to realize it is unwise to give children unfettered access to screens on their own. Without even trying, we stumble across pornography. So, the fact that parents give their children smartphones with data plans at ages eight and nine is a bad idea to me. And I think that we need to set a norm in our families that all of us use our devices in view of each other—they aren't our private devices—as much as possible. Also, establishing that we use these things together for

a very specific purpose; we don't just aimlessly browse around.

The trickier thing is how to handle other parents who will not have those same boundaries. The kids will be with friends who have autonomous devices with untrammelled internet service. The reality is boys in particular, but girls as well, go to and show each other these sites. I think one thing you can do is establish an expectation that your kids will talk with you about what they see on their friends' phones.

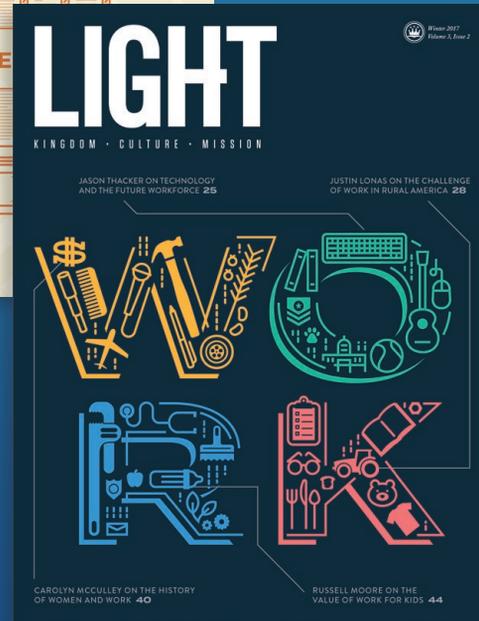
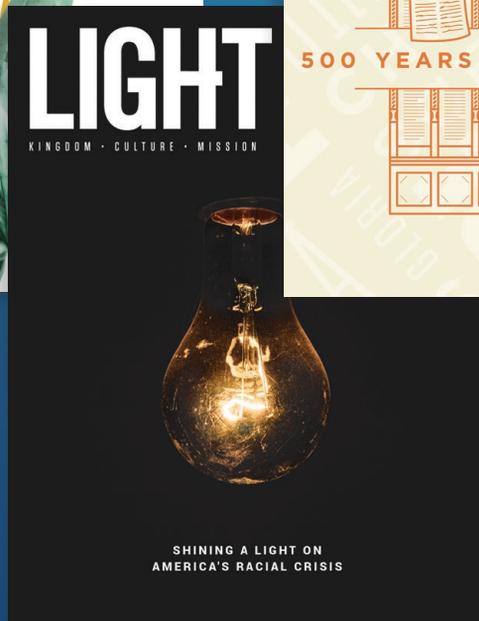
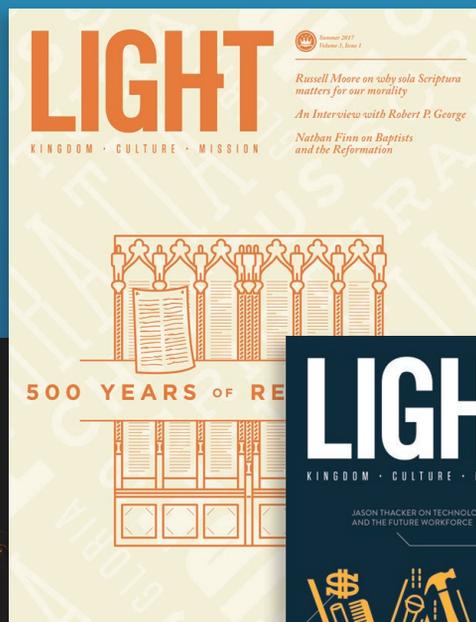
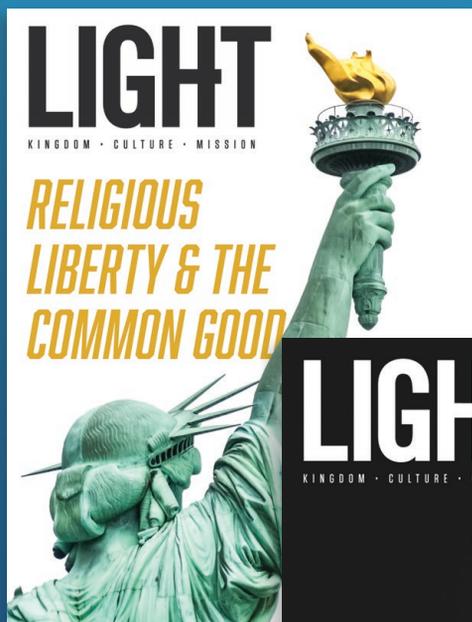
I will say one other thing that I've seen done that is really helpful, though we didn't do this with our kids in the same way that my friend has done. He has four adolescent sons, 11 to 18 or so, and he said to them, "I am your dad. It is my job to know more about what's going on in your life than anyone else in your life, and that means I can pick up your phone at any moment. I can ask you any question at any moment."

It's almost less the practice of actually picking up the device, unless you have some reason to think you need to intervene in that way, and it is more the expectation: I'm your parent, and until you are grown, I am going to be the one who is more invested in your story—not your friends or your pastor. That is the healthy approach that lays the foundation for handling whatever our kids come across. ★

ANDY CROUCH is senior strategist at the John Templeton Foundation.

RUSSELL MOORE is the president of the ERLC.





Subscribe Online Now

2 Issues, Only \$10/Year

ERLC.com/Light

Are you looking for an accessible, easy-to-understand guide on some of the most pressing cultural issues of our day? *Light* Magazine is a semiannual publication about the most talked about topics facing the church and the public square. You can subscribe for your print copies online today or view a free PDF copy and share it with your friends.



THE TENSION OF TECHNOLOGY

HOPE AND FEAR IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Jason Thacker



OCTOBER 4, 1957, MAY not seem like an important date, but it was a major turning point for the history of technology. Newspapers across the country ran headlines about an “artificial moon” traveling in space at over 18,000 mph. It was launched by the Soviet Union as the first man-made object to ever leave earth’s atmosphere. The successful launch of Sputnik was a surprise, especially to the Americans. This feat didn’t seem possible because of the state of rocket technology.

As news spread about the satellite’s launch, the public’s reaction was a mix of panic and awe as they questioned its purpose. Many probably listened to the satellite’s steady beep on their household radios in a state of amazement and wonder, excited for the future. Others, however, were likely filled with a deep and paralyzing fear of the unknown as they tuned in. They had no context for what would come next. War? Weakness? Instability?

The launch of Sputnik also brought about a renewed commitment by the United States to regain its technological advantage. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy famously proclaimed that the U.S. would put a man on the moon within the decade. That proclamation was fulfilled and helped usher in countless other technological advances outside of the space industry that we still benefit from today.

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE TECHNOLOGY

Most people, when thinking about technology, conjure up the idea of a smartphone, the internet, self-driving cars, or maybe even popular types of artificial intelligence such as Apple’s Siri or Google Home. But one of the biggest misconceptions surrounding technology is that it always has to do with the newest or latest gadget.

We tend to miss the fact that every generation of humanity has used technology in various ways for the benefit of society. From the advent of the wheel to the invention of paper, humans have

tool that helped him work the ground. Likewise, the tools we make can be used in ways that don’t honor God or people. Our rebellion has led to a breakdown of the fundamental purpose of technology.

WE ARE CREATURES FASCINATED BY THE NEW,
AND OLDER TECHNOLOGIES OFTEN BECOME SO
INTEGRATED INTO OUR LIVES THAT WE FORGET
ABOUT THEM ENTIRELY.

always used technology to aid us in our work and lives. We are creatures fascinated by the new, and older technologies often become so integrated into our lives that we forget about them entirely.

Simply put, technology is a tool that God has solely allowed human beings to create. God created each of us in his image (Gen. 1:26-27), distinct from the rest of creation with a rational mind and specific jobs to do for our good and his glory. Adam and Eve were given the first jobs—“be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion” (1:28). They were also put in the garden “to work it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15).

Technology is a part of this calling because it allows us to do our work more efficiently. Its purpose is to help society by allowing us to work out our callings in ways that reflect the creative nature of God. The ability to dream up and make new things like technology is a way in which we display his glory.

Yet, we know that this world is marred by sin. Technology is often misused and abused, resulting in more pain and suffering. Cain and Abel are an example of this. Cain killed Abel in the field, presumably using some sort of

All is not lost, though. The earth is being renewed, and technology is one way that we can fight back against the brokenness of this world. So, we must keep in mind that technology, itself, isn’t good or evil. Instead, we must choose if we are going to use it wickedly or redemptively.

HOPE, APATHY, AND FEAR AS WE THINK ABOUT TECHNOLOGY

We often have a mix of three emotions when it comes to technology. We see its benefits, which fill us with hope for the future and encourages dreams of the good it can do. Conversely, we see the possible dangers, misuses, or pitfalls of a given piece of technology, which fill us with a great fear of the unknown. So, we choose to withdraw from it or outright reject an innovation as threatening. But more often than not, we simply don’t think about the technology around us and grow increasingly apathetic to its affect on our daily lives.

As a cutting-edge form of technology, artificial intelligence is a field that often evokes these emotions. It’s such a new, mysterious development that many are confounded by it or choose to ignore



AS A FALLEN PEOPLE, WE ARE OFTEN OBLIVIOUS TO HOW WE EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY, FALLING PREY TO OVERUSE AND EXCESSIVE DEPENDENCE ON IT.

its implications on our society. And the mix of feelings is justified.

Its benefits are many. Through the use of AI, we have seen numerous fields transformed, such as healthcare, economics, transportation, manufacturing, education, and even security. For example, AI-empowered security systems are able to use video-image recognition to tell the difference between a potential threat at your home or office and a friend coming by to visit, all using algorithms that can decipher between faces. The system then alerts the user to anything it deems hostile.

Yet, there are dangers to this technology, as well. How might this type of AI recognition be used in malicious ways? It is already being debated for use in autonomous drone strikes, where the AI compiles a list of enemy targets that the drones then attack.

Or, think about the overlooked downfalls of something as seemingly harmless as a navigation app like Waze. My family uses Waze nearly every day to get to our destinations by the “quickest” way possible. While we often bypass traffic or find out about delays as they happen, many users have become so dependent on this technology that they are unable to find their own way home. Moreover, when is the last time we thought about *how* Waze calculates the fastest way to our destinations or how it might be using the data it collects from each drive? We already know the data is used to help develop personalized ads to display along our drives, but that data can also be used in a variety of ways not yet known to us.

MOVING FORWARD, THINKING CRITICALLY

So, with this reality in front of us, how are we to think about technology in a world that saturates us with it?

First, we need to remember the purpose for technology and the dangers in its use.

As Christians, we must think about technology through the lens of wisdom. We should embrace its benefits, yet not blindly accept every new innovation. And we should be mindful of its dangers, but not outrightly reject the good gifts of God. The tools that the Lord gave us the ability to design are for us to use wisely to aid our work and lives, not to control us or to be used in unethical ways that harm others. We should seek to use them in healthy, God-honoring ways.

As a fallen people, we are often oblivious to how we embrace technology, falling prey to overuse and excessive dependence on it. We might not even recognize our addiction, but it’s pervasive. One way to combat this enslavement to technology and to think clearly about its effects on our lives is to take various breaks from its grip. It would be good for our minds and hearts to perform tasks manually from time to time. We can do this by evaluating what we choose to automate in our lives and asking key questions. Does a particular app or device aid or distract us from our callings? Are there hidden dangers that might warrant us changing how we use the technology?

Second, we need to connect with others. As we seek to disconnect from technology, we

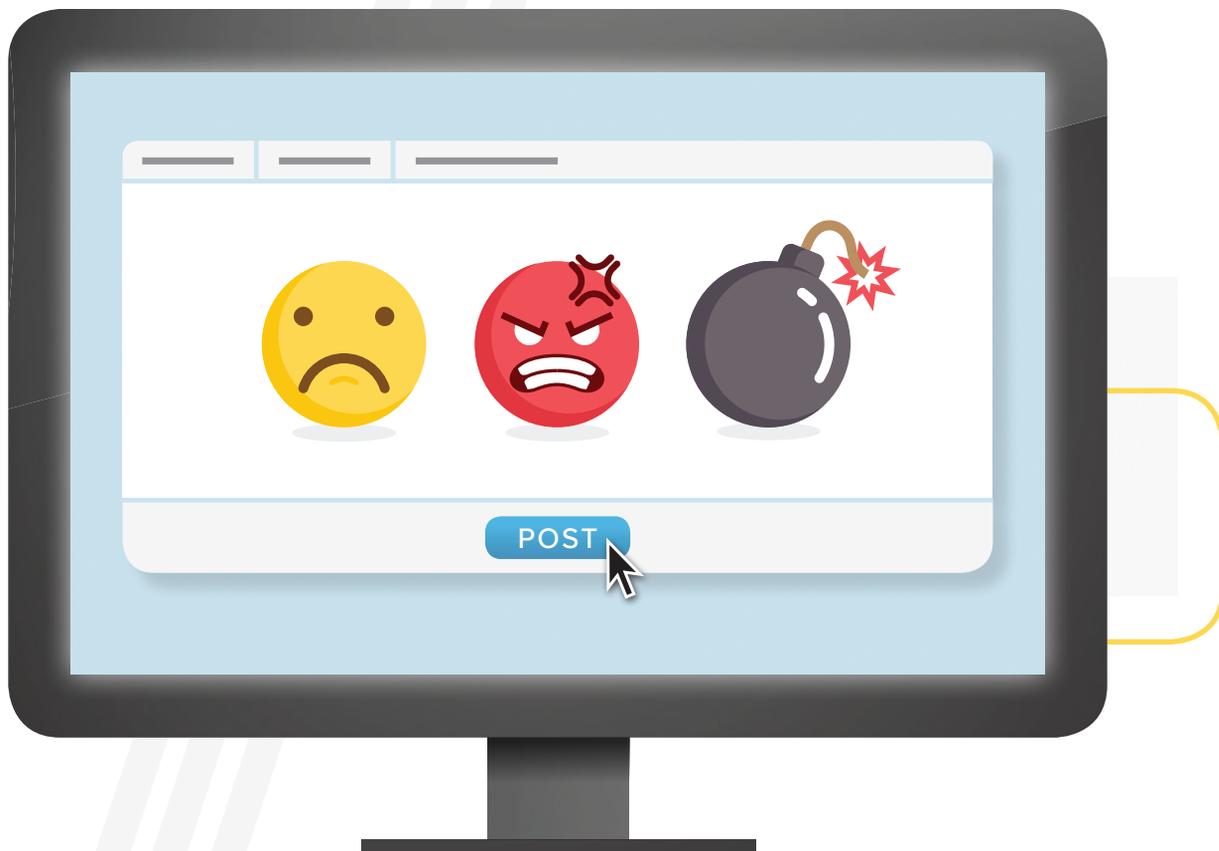
need to talk to friends about the potential blind spots we have in its use. We should also evaluate any ways that we are rejecting it because of fear. An honest dialogue will help us identify how we are misusing these tools. It will also help us identify underlying dangers and navigate how we will implement future progress in our lives and workplaces.

If we are uncertain about a piece of technology, we can ask trusted friends, or even pick up a book or read an article, to help guide us through it. They might help us make the decision to turn off the navigation app for once and find our own way home. Or, more importantly, maybe they will give us the extra push we need to put down our phones for a night and have real conversations with those around us.

Lastly, we need to be reminded about the foundational truths of our faith. Our God is not intimidated by our technological advances. He reigns sovereign over our past, present, and future. Nothing catches him off guard or will replace him as our greatest good. Technology is an instrument that he has given us to fulfill the greatest commandments, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-39).

So as we move forward in an increasingly complex and advanced society, we need to remember that all of technology, from “artificial moons” to artificial intelligence, is to be used for the glory of God and the good of others. We must be those who engage it with intentionality, using the wisdom that our God gives freely to partner in his redemptive work. ★

JASON THACKER is the creative director at the ERLC.



Technology & Online Communication

MAINTAINING OUR CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN THE WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Chris Martin

THE MEDIUM OF DIGITAL communication presents specific challenges that push us toward a pendulum swing. When it comes to our conduct online as Christians, one extreme is a relentless pursuit of social media conflict for the sake of proclaiming the gospel and its implications. The other extreme is a ferocious posture of social media apathy despite wanting others to know the call of the Savior.

I have lived in both of these extremes, but neither feels right. Technological communication is difficult because it removes face-to-face interaction and seems to force us to adopt one of these two extremes. The way social media functions encourages conflict, debate, and banter, yet impedes our ability to discern the tone and motivation that undergirds how we communicate. Sarcasm, for instance,

is almost impossible to detect in the digital space.

Just a few years ago, when I scored my first “real world” job managing the blogs and social media of some Christian executives, I thought I was a pro. I entered into countless theological and ideological social media feuds. Unfortunately, in my attempts to be a culture warrior and bastion of truth, I looked a lot less like Jesus online than I did offline.

After a couple of years of trying to impress people who agreed with me by crushing people who didn't, the Lord opened my eyes to my sin. Though I still love studying social media and do everything I can to help Christians use it wisely, I now tend to the other, apathetic extreme: "Perhaps it is better not to say anything at all than to fight for what is right and risk my witness."

Communicating a healthy balance of love and truth online can feel difficult, if not impossible. A number of factors create this environment. Social media is where nuance goes to die. We do not like to give strangers the benefit of the doubt and assume the worst about those with whom we are arguing. Most of all, social media is ultimately rooted in entertainment more than it is in civil discourse. In his 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman writes concerning the television, "Television, as I have implied earlier, serves us most usefully when presenting junk-entertainment; it serves us most ill when it co-opts serious modes of discourse . . . and turns them into entertainment packages." I am beginning to wonder if the same is true for social media.

Is social media built to bear the burden of civil, constructive discourse? I'm not sure it is. Regardless, we have to ask ourselves: How do we maintain a Christian witness in our present social media environment?

LEADING ONLINE WITH LOVE

Simply, we lead with love. It sounds trite and cheesy, but it's the most effective means of communicating Christ on social media. We bear witness to the love of God online, not by telling people they are sinful and wrong, but by communicating our love and care for them, even if we disagree with them. Social media has not yet proven to be a forum in which someone can be argued to a place of repentance and faith. Instead of bearing witness to Christ by telling others how they grieve him, let's bear witness to Christ by showing others how he loves them. We shouldn't always refrain from speaking the truth on social media, but unfortunately, we often seem more interested in calling out the sin of strangers online than we are in confronting the sin in our own hearts, homes, or churches.

How do we actually lead with love on social media? Here are three basic ways

we can conduct ourselves in a way that communicates the love of Christ:

1. Be intentional about how you manage your online presence.

One of the quickest ways to get yourself in trouble on social media is to neglect a strategy for using each platform on which you maintain a presence. Scrolling mindlessly on Instagram, commenting immediately on Facebook, or hopping on Twitter to vent in a moment of frustration while watching the news are all preludes to disaster. Why? Such activity lacks intentionality.

When we use social media without intentionality, we use it selfishly. That doesn't mean intentionality always yields selfless social media use—I can testify firsthand that it doesn't work that way. But, if we hop on social media to scroll carelessly or to express annoyance, we are probably using it to serve ourselves rather than to serve others. If we formalize a strategy and explicitly state our intentions for using social media, we are more apt to have a plan and less likely to make ourselves look foolish.

We often seem more interested in calling out the sin of strangers online than we are in confronting the sin in our own hearts, homes, or churches.





When we use social media without intentionality, we use it selfishly.



How do we do this? Start a Google Doc or open a journal, and make a list of three goals for each social media platform you use. If you aren't sure what these goals look like, follow the "SMART" method. Goals you set should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. Afterward, write a short statement about how you hope to accomplish each one. Finally, make a list of three to five temptations or pitfalls that social media may bring to the fore for you. It is important to keep track of all of this in a virtual or paper document for yourself to reference from time to time and for accountability, which will be addressed later.

2. Create content that serves people and points them to Jesus

The cornerstone of an intentional social media strategy that is an effective witness to the gospel is creating engaging content that serves your target audience.

Part of my job is coaching Christians on how to use social media to serve their churches, communities, donors,

or similar audiences. A lot of my coaching revolves around the ever-changing best practices and tactics we must deploy in order to maintain the delicate dance with algorithms and other factors. But, before I coach anyone on how to understand the Facebook algorithm or the best ways to use Instagram hashtags, I tell them this: There is no substitute for creating good content. No social media tricks, strategies, or "hacks" can make up for its absence.

What is "good content?" It's pretty simple. "Good content" is content that serves the needs of your target audience with the gifts God has given you. It is engaging content, and engaging content is the fuel that keeps a social media strategy chugging along toward its goals.

When we create good, engaging content that points people to Jesus—whether it's about the importance of passing a particular law or how to teach your children to read their Bibles—we are on our way to using social media to bear witness to the love of Jesus.

3. Surround yourself with people who are willing to keep you accountable even if it makes you uncomfortable.

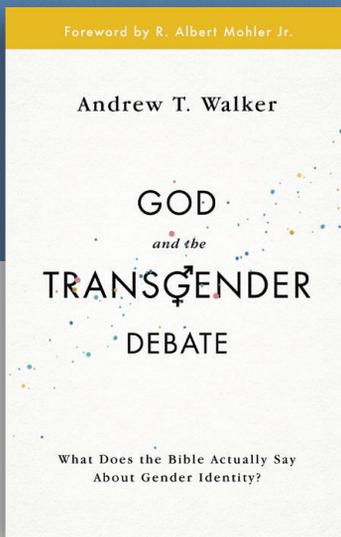
You could set selfless goals, create engaging content, and use the gifts God has given you to serve other people online all on your own, and you would be just fine—at least for a while. But all of us get stuck in a rut on occasion, and we definitely give in to temptations to sin more often than we may be willing to admit. Even the best laid social media strategies can go awry when we have moments of weakness online—it is just too tempting to fire off a sarcastic Facebook comment or craft the perfect subtweet.

A God-glorifying social media strategy needs to be supported by a group of individuals willing to keep the driver accountable to the plan he or she has made. So, we should make our goals, plans, and weaknesses public for a group of people we trust to hold us accountable. It is important that we are careful not to ask "yes men." We need to surround ourselves with those who can lovingly give us constructive criticism and call us out when it is clear our social media activity is being driven by selfish pride instead of a servant's heart.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to "let [our] light shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16, CSB). Social media may not have existed when Jesus delivered the Sermon, but our online activity provides us a unique opportunity to shine this light to a larger audience than ever before. The question is, will our social media platforms be more about Jesus or ourselves? ★

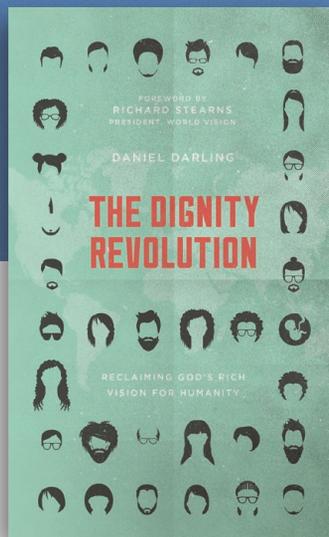
CHRIS MARTIN is an author development specialist at LifeWay and co-creator of LifeWay social.

New Resources from ERLC Staff



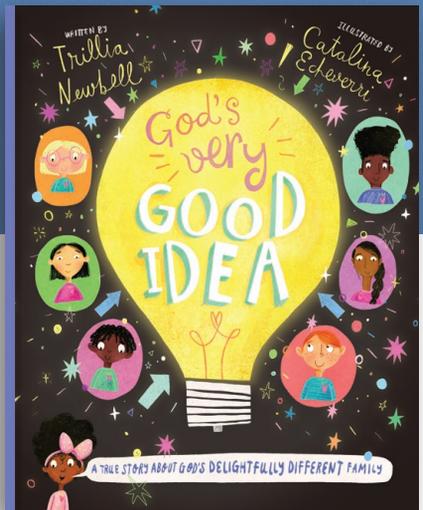
God and the Transgender Debate

by Andrew T. Walker



The Dignity Revolution: Reclaiming God's Rich Vision for Humanity

by Daniel Darling



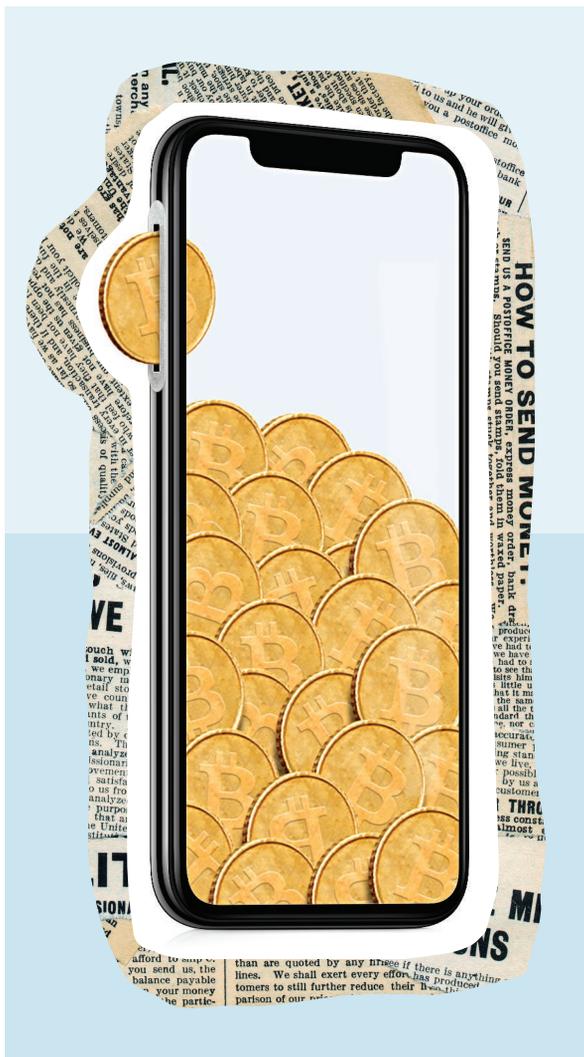
God's Very Good Idea

by Trillia Newbell



Available now at [ERLC.com/Store](https://www.ERLC.com/Store)

TECHNOLOGY & ECONOMICS



EVALUATING DIGITAL CURRENCY'S USE IN FURTHERING GOD'S KINGDOM

Taylor Barkley

HAVE YOU HEARD THE term Bitcoin? It's an example of technology making the unimaginable, possible. But, is Bitcoin just another scheme to get rich quick? Is it a currency designed for criminals? Or could there be a role for Bitcoin to play in Christ's redemption of a broken world? It's a challenging concept, yet Christians have an obligation to explore how this new instrument of exchange, just like any other currency and technology, is under Christ's final authority.

Last year, the world's most famous cryptocurrency, or digital currency, saw its largest spike in price ever, bringing it mainstream media and investor attention. Even though the idea was first presented in 2008 and the software released in 2009, most people are still trying to wrap their heads around what Bitcoin is.

WHAT IS BITCOIN?

Bitcoin is the first feasible iteration of what was thought to be impossible: peer-to-peer transactions via the internet. A peer-to-peer transaction is the same as you handing someone cash at a garage sale and receiving a lawnmower in return. The only way buying a lawnmower online was viable before was through intermediaries and third-parties like banks, credit card companies, and services like PayPal to verify that cash had left your account and gone into the hands or account of the other person. Bitcoin is able to handle transactions of this type on the internet because of the underlying technology called the blockchain.

A blockchain, as David Siegel explains¹, is a shared ledger that everyone trusts to be accurate forever. Most commonly, ledgers are centralized, or owned by a firm or individual. Now, though, they can be kept on a decentralized blockchain, which allows new opportunities. Blockchains can serve a variety of functions where a reliable ledger is necessary, such as for property titles or voting systems. Discussions about Bitcoin can conflate the discussion of Bitcoin (the currency) and blockchains (the ledger). Think of Bitcoin, the currency, as an application running on the blockchain, or ledger.

Bitcoin is the earliest and most prominent example of what a blockchain can do. It provides a glimpse into the potential of a world where systems that require us to trust powerful corporations and governments can be replaced by decentralized systems maintained by people best able to help themselves and each other. Individuals in such a world have far more control over what they do and how they do it, both for good or ill. For the purposes of this article, Bitcoin will be an applied use of blockchain technology.

Bitcoin and its descendants that use similar blockchain technology should not just be thought of as money or currency, but as technological platforms. The currency component is perhaps the most utilized and popular application of Bitcoin, but it is far from the only one. The high volatility and risk of Bitcoin as a currency and investment can distract from the more exciting implications of the technology. Thinking of Bitcoin only as a currency would be akin to thinking of the internet as only a platform for sending mail to one another.

WHAT SHOULD CHRISTIANS THINK OF BITCOIN?

Christians who ask what they should think of Bitcoin are essentially asking what they should think of any new technology. Too often, criticism and skepticism are the default starting points for thinking about advancements in digital technologies.

The first biblical account of technology could be considered when Adam and Eve fashioned leaves to cover their nakedness. Then, God did them one better—a 2.0 upgrade, if you will—by making them clothing out of animal skins. This taught humanity a lot about what it means to use technology. Leaves are certainly inferior to animal skins when it comes to protection, warmth, and durability. Bitcoin, blockchain, and cryptocurrency

should be thought of in a similar vein. Even if it doesn't replace cash or credit cards, perhaps it will lead to some other previously impossible innovation.

In their book, *The Age of Cryptocurrency*, Paul Vigna and Michael J. Casey start off on the right note for how Christians should think about Bitcoin. They tell the story of Parisa Ahmadi, who was a high school student in Herat, Afghanistan, at the time of writing. Parisa was enrolled in an online nonprofit film service called Film Annex, but due to laws in Afghanistan that prohibited women from holding bank accounts, payment for writing and film projects proved difficult. The authors recount how Film Annex started to pay its contributors in Bitcoin.

As previously described, Bitcoin's peer-to-peer network allows users to send payments directly to each other, circumventing institutions that in this case would have prohibited Parisa from accessing her rightly earned money because she is a woman. As they say,

Indeed, bitcoin does not know your name or gender, so it allows women in patriarchal societies, at least those with access to the Internet, to control their own money. The importance of this cannot be overstated . . . While not a panacea, this blast of cutting-edge, twenty-first-century technology offers real promise as a way to help unshackle an entire swath of the human population (pp. 2-3).

Anything with that kind of promise deserves Christian attention and the Spirit-filled ingenuity of Christian inventors and investors.

Christians should also consider the tremendous need for the

unbanked to have access to money. Jerry Brito at Coin Center, a public policy group in Washington, D.C., notes that 2.5 billion people on earth are without bank accounts. Yet, 6 billion people will have smartphones by 2019. That leaves a large space for Bitcoin and other cryptocurrency developers to make and provide services alleviating millions, if not billions, of people from poverty. Everyone with a smartphone theoretically has access to the Bitcoin network.

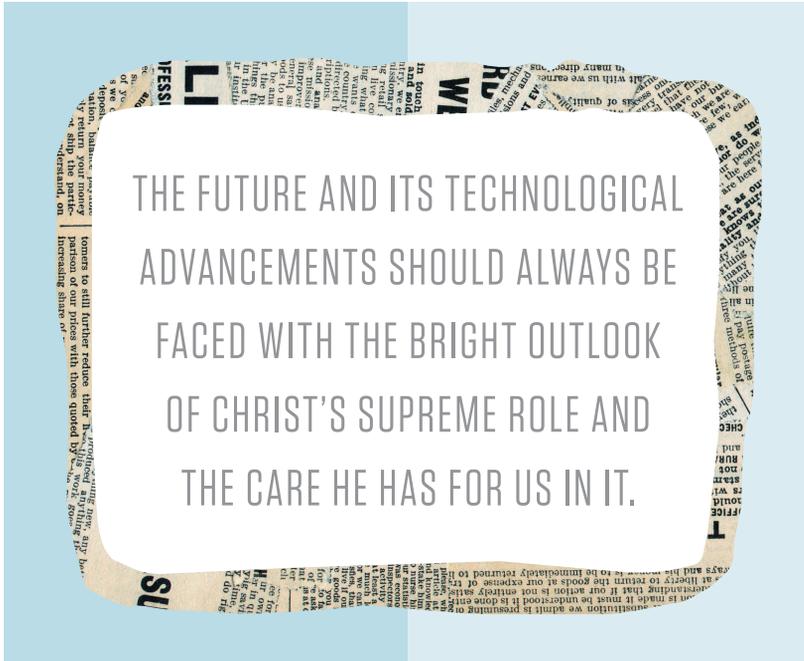
Access to monetary systems, of course, does not spell salvation for the world. However, access to capital can allow people to fully develop and pursue their God-given interests and abilities. For example, World Vision's work of providing livestock and property to the rural poor is rightly motivated by this fundamental belief.

ARE COMMON CRITICISMS MISGUIDED?

We are only in the 10th year of this technological experiment—into a new way of operating. As with any experiment, like the example of the early internet, there have been failures, such as the theft of 850,000 Bitcoins from Mt. Gox; the failure of the promising 37Coins; and the hack of The DAO, a decentralized organization that ran on Ethereum.

In addition to fears over failures, two common critiques of Bitcoin seem to be:





1. It was created as an anonymous digital currency for criminal activity and;
2. Ultimately, it was designed to subvert governmental authority.

Yet, both of these critiques are mistaken.

Many of these criticisms could also be leveled against cash. Bitcoin is often referred to incorrectly as an anonymous currency. However, for every illicit and illegal activity carried out via Bitcoin, there is likely exponentially more wrongdoing done with cash. Cash is truly anonymous; Bitcoin is pseudonymous. Every transaction is made publicly available as a feature of the system. Think of it as inverse of credit card transactions. With credit cards, the transactions are private, but the names are public. With Bitcoin, the transactions are public, but the real names are private.

Bitcoin actually helped law enforcement catch the Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht, aka Dread Pirate Roberts. To catch him, they followed him into a library, staged a distraction after he had opened his laptop, then sprung for his laptop with all its access to Silk Road accounts and his credentials. From there, law enforcement

could backtrace his transactions as recorded in the blockchain. The same technique is impossible with cash.

The argument that Bitcoin was created for illicit and black market transactions is also misguided. It's true that Bitcoin was developed in order to dispense with middlemen. However, there is no evidence of a nefarious motivation from Bitcoin's creator, Satoshi Nakamoto. As Nakamoto stated in the 2008 paper that began this whole endeavor, "What is needed is an electronic payment system based on cryptographic proof instead of trust, allowing any two willing parties to transact directly with each other without the need for a trusted third party." This was merely a new technological platform that some have used for immoral purposes—just like cash.

Furthermore, there are many justifiable reasons for avoiding third parties. Sometimes they are unreliable, like countries that undergo regime changes or political and economic crises. Many times, the world's poor are marginalized and

do not have access to traditional banking systems. Bitcoin removes the need to configure a new set of complex institutions.

Christians, in particular, should be wary of unjust institutions because Christian history is replete with persecution. Imagine being able to give directly to the Christian family and missionaries you know in Iran, instead of risking their lives by sending through channels closely watched by a hostile government. For now, this might be suboptimal, but these are still the early days of this technology.

Finally, whether as a fad or a global revolution, new technologies like Bitcoin are not a cause for alarm for the believer. They should be viewed in the context of Christ's supremacy, his redemptive plan, and his invitation into that redemptive plan. Christians, by definition, are not governed by fear, no matter how compelling a fearful attitude might be. Rather, Christians should engage with this and other technologies, seeking to understand the nuances, underlying theories, and how they could be a part of how the kingdom of God is made visible and demonstrated on the earth—"thy kingdom come."

New technologies should never be examined in a vacuum. Societal changes will happen along the way that will help us adapt as they develop, demonstrating the creativity and resilience of God's kingdom. Christians, of all people, shouldn't shirk from an honest examination of what may have bearing on poverty alleviation for millions. Instead, the future and its technological advancements should always be faced with the bright outlook of Christ's supreme role and the care he has for us in it. ★

¹ <https://medium.com/startup-grind/what-is-this-blockchain-thing-a5d2abb99297>

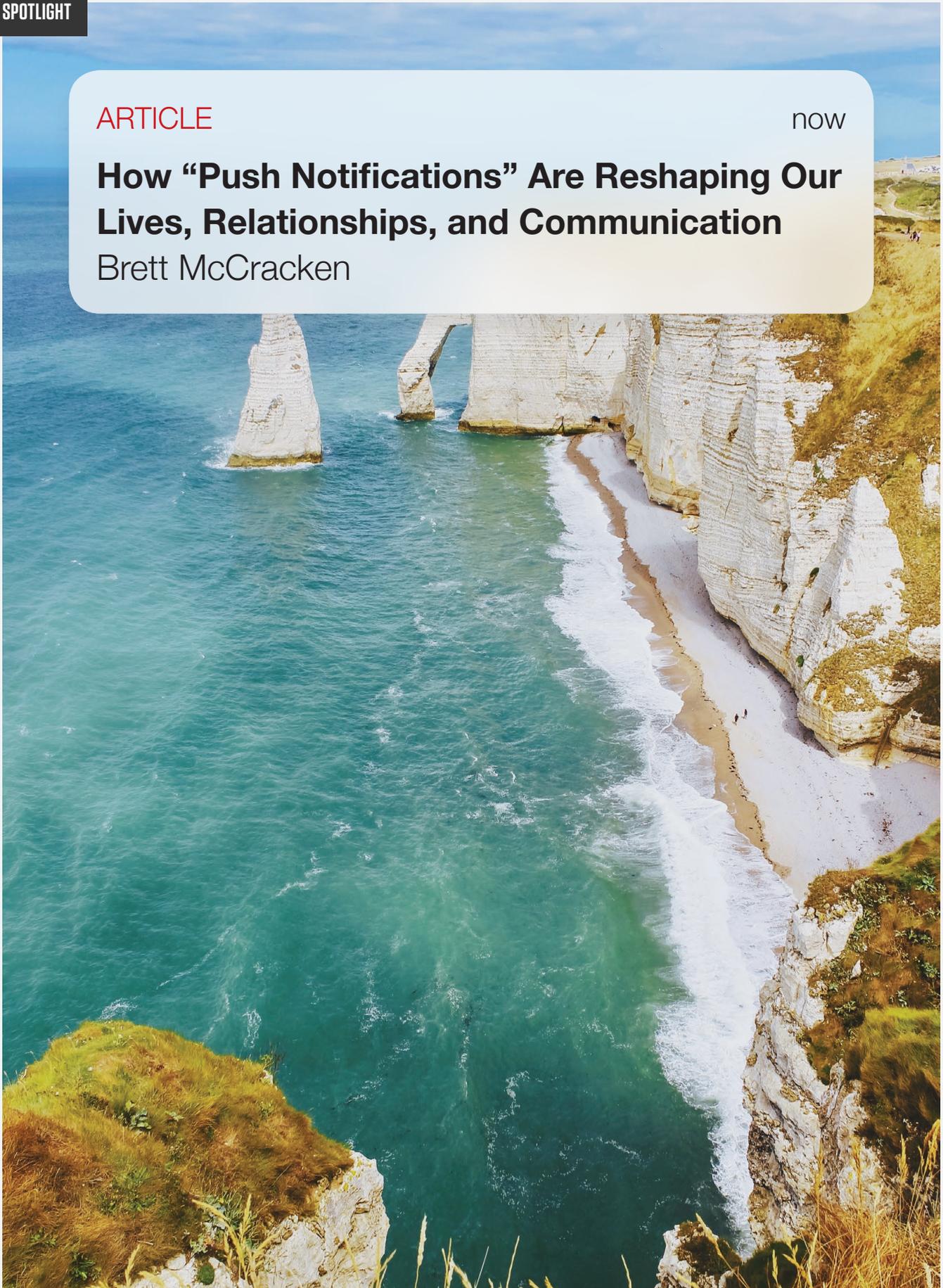
TAYLOR BARKLEY is the government affairs manager at the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

ARTICLE

now

How “Push Notifications” Are Reshaping Our Lives, Relationships, and Communication

Brett McCracken



Every new communication technology is disruptive, often in history-altering ways. Nearly 600 years ago, Gutenberg's printing press ushered in a revolution in education, politics, and religion, including fanning the flames of the Protestant Reformation. Just 11 years ago, Steve Jobs' iPhone ushered in a similar revolution, one we are only beginning to grasp.

Will the smartphone still be around in 600 years? I doubt it, but no one knows for sure. What we do know is that in its first decade of existence, the smartphone is already changing how we view communication. What are those changes? Are they good or bad for society? These are important questions to ask of any new technology, and I consider them in light of one particular aspect of the smartphone era: the phenomenon of "push notifications."

The Consequences of Efficiency

It used to be a thing of joy to receive a letter in the mailbox. In the early days of the internet, "you've got mail" was a happy notification. These days, I find most forms of "push notifications" to be anxiety-producing. Why? Because they signal a tidal wave of nonstop communication that is relentless and punishing.

How does one stay sane in a world where on any given day, people message you through email (multiple accounts), Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, SnapChat, Voxel, WhatsApp, Slack, Skype, Google chat, and texts (to name a few)? All these forms of communication are efficient. But what are the unintended consequences of that efficiency?

Here are two points we should consider:

1 Chronic catch-up

Because inboxes are never empty and notifications on a plethora of platforms pop up around the clock, I find myself in a

Indeed, one of the great perils of the smartphone is its capacity for destructive distraction: drawing our attention in a thousand different directions when our priority should be on the proximate people and local problems in front of us.

constant state of catch-up. I try to make headway in my email inbox, but then there are Facebook messages and Tweets I need to reply to. There are Voxel messages from my fellow elders at church about urgent pastoral situations. Various co-workers need my insights on Slack, and my wife is messaging me over chat.

All of it feels urgent, demanding timely replies. And the cumulative effect is that it reduces would-be meaningful interactions to mere checklist to-dos: "Text ___ back." "Respond to ___'s email." "Post ___ article on Twitter."

But in this frenetic flurry of catch-up, the "communing" sacredness of communication can be lost. We are often too bombarded and harried to make space for considered, attentive, meaningful communication. The smartphone has always been touted as a tool of efficiency, and so naturally this is how we use it. But what if communication is degraded when it becomes too efficient? A tweet or a text in response to someone may be quick and easy, but is that always the wisest way to respond?

Christians, especially, should be mindful of how the efficient view of communication changes how we relate to people. Are we treating them with dignity, giving them our attention and presence? Or do we demean and cheapen them through our quick-draw posture?

When we are spread so thin, across dozens of communication platforms and with hundreds of "friends" and "connections," the need to "update" the masses can trump the nobler desire to connect with a few people more personally and profoundly. In our hectic, breathless days, we may be tempted to send a quick text or email to someone who actually deserves a more substantive and careful response.

2 When everything is important, nothing is

There is an "everything is urgent and important" quality to the smartphone and its ambience of buzz/ding/beep push notifications. Whether it's a text message that ends in the ubiquitous words "*let me know*," a BREAKING NEWS alert, or something #trending that you simply have to know about, the smartphone constantly reminds us of things to do, information to take in, and people to communicate with. At least five times every day I see social media declarations that something is a "must-read," "must-watch," or "must-listen." The glut of "essential" content means our *must* list gets longer

and longer, adding to our already lengthy queue of communication to-dos.

This is part of why we can’t put our smartphones down, checking them hundreds of times per day. What are we missing? We don’t want to be out of the loop. Plus, there is an undeniable thrill to seeing new notifications. Psychologists have noted the way smartphone notifications trigger a dopamine rush that becomes addictive.

As psychologist

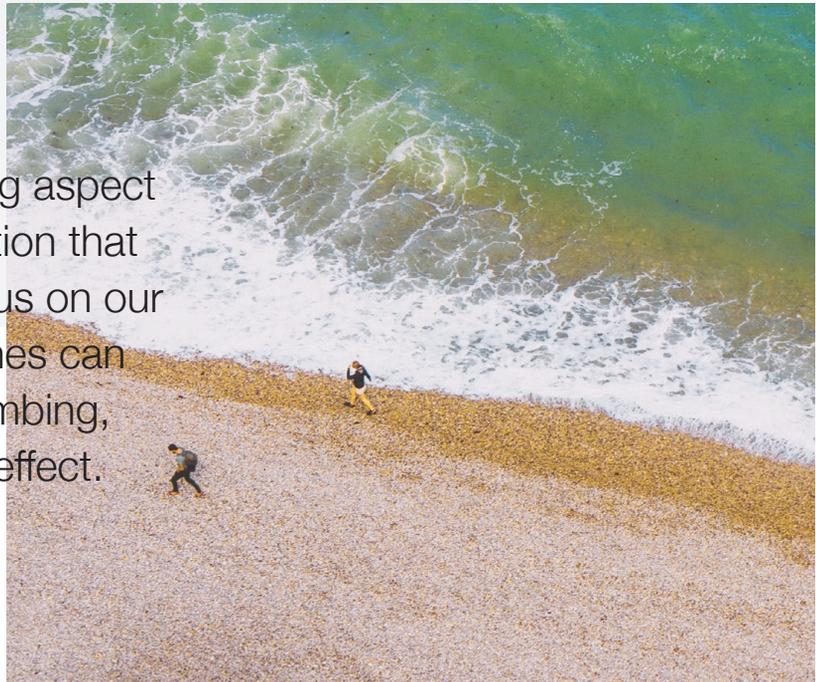
David Greenfield recently told NPR, “Smartphone notifications have turned us all into Pavlov’s dogs.”

One of the (many) side effects of notification addiction is that we lose a sense for what is actually important and urgent. Do we really need to read every “news” story that comes across our phones? The leveling aspect of information that comes to us on our smartphones—sports scores next to CaringBridge cancer updates next to theological debates about gender roles next to videos of your aunt’s cat—can have a numbing, trivializing effect. Neil Postman noted this, presciently, in his 1985 book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, in which he talked about the “Now. . . this” nature of televised news:

“Now, this. . .” is commonly used on radio and television newscasts to indicate that what one has just heard or seen has no relevance to what one is about to hear or see, or possibly to anything one is ever likely to hear or see. The phrase is a means of acknowledging the fact that the world as mapped by the speeded-up electronic media has no order or meaning and is not to be taken seriously.

Because the smartphone tends to perpetuate an exaggerated sense of the importance and urgency of *everything*, we

The leveling aspect of information that comes to us on our smartphones can have a numbing, trivializing effect.



can naturally get sucked into its orbit, to the point that we neglect the *truly* important and urgent matters in our own lives, families, and communities. Indeed, one of the great perils of the smartphone is its capacity for destructive distraction: drawing our attention in a thousand different directions when our priority should be on the proximate people and local problems in front of us.

The smartphone’s push notifications can crowd out the more vital flags and warning lights in our lives that should grab our attention. Are you spending quality time with your spouse and children? Do you read the Bible and pray in the morning, before you check your phone? When was the last time you invited someone over for dinner? Are you paying attention to your physical health? Have you had a substantive, in-person interaction with a close friend recently?

If your smartphone is crowding out these more-important “life notifications,” do something about it. Turn off your push notifications. Consider downgrading to a “dumb” phone that only does two or three things. Set things up so that the agenda for your time and attention is set by the life right in front of you—your home, church, workplace, community—rather than the smartphone maelstrom. ★

BRETT MCCRACKEN is a senior editor for *The Gospel Coalition*.



LETTERS NATIONS READ

How Technology is Speeding Along the Work of Bible Translation

Lauren McAfee

LAST FALL, MY HUSBAND and I anxiously boarded a plane and traveled for 24 hours to an unfamiliar country in order to visit friends. It was a trip that enlightened me in many ways.

Due to security reasons, I'm not able to share the name of our destination. The religious status of this country is 99 percent Muslim, with all remaining religious groups making up less than one percent of the population. This means that the number of Christians is a fraction of a percentage of the total population. Those that convert

to Christianity are at risk of serious social and governmental persecution.

A SHOPOWNER AND A BIBLE

One day while spending the week with our friends, we enjoyed a stroll around the local market. As we walked the crowded, winding street, we stepped into a quaint leather goods shop. It was no more than the size of a small bedroom, but more than a hundred hand-crafted leather goods lined the walls from front to back. Other than the leather bags, satchels, and wallets,

there were two small desks in the back portion of the shop where the owner was working on his next product. The smell of fresh leather was comforting. In a country with so many strange sounds and smells, this felt familiar.

We were the only people in the shop, and our friend struck up a conversation with the owner. I could tell by the way they spoke to each other in the local dialect that they were friends. I couldn't understand what was said, but after a short exchange, the owner took a few steps toward the front of the shop to close and lock the

door. He then pulled out a few chairs from the back and invited us to sit. As we all settled into our chairs, the owner reached into a small drawer of his work desk and pulled out an object wrapped in leather. He carefully unwrapped the object, and handed me a book.

I opened the book to find that it was in a language I didn't recognize. I flipped through the pages, but there was no English in sight. I knew this book was special, but its message meant nothing to me because of the language barrier. Even if I did recognize some of the words, it would take too long for me to work through the hundreds of pages so I could understand just a little bit.

Our friend explained that this book was a translation of the Bible in a local dialect. The owner was one of the few Christians in the city, and he had dedicated a large part of his life to the creation of this translation while running his leather shop to support himself. I was struck by the risk that this man was willing to take for the sake of providing access to God's Word to the few other people he knew that would care to read its pages. This was a man who truly knew the value and power of the Bible. He treasured it more than life itself.

THE PRIVILEGE OF HAVING THE BIBLE IN OUR LANGUAGE

The experience made me wonder: What if that was the closest I ever got to reading God's Word—holding it in my hand, but stopped from ever engaging the truth within because of the language barrier?

Many of us have never spent time thinking about what life would be like without access to the Bible in our language. Consider all the times you have looked to the Bible for comfort, direction, and truth. Imagine having all of that stripped away. What if no one you know owned or had ever read the

Bible? This would affect every area of your life.

It is hard to imagine a context in Western civilization where the Bible's basic stories are not available, at least. But, there was a time when the Bible was not accessible in English. The Old and New Testament were originally written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Someone had to do the work of translating the Bible into our language. Fortunately, there were people like William Tyndale who lost his life because of translating the Bible.

My uncle frequently mentions the fact that of the roughly 6,000 vital languages in the world today, only 2,100 have a Bible translation. While those 2,100 languages represent a majority of the world's population, that still leaves more than 1 billion people that do not have the ability to read the words "for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" in their heart language.

TAKING THE BIBLE TO EVERY NATION, FASTER

What is the solution to this issue? How can the Bible be translated into every language in the world? Years ago, this was a burning question on my uncle's heart after he realized the power of Bible translation. He was moved as he watched an elderly man weep over receiving the Bible in his language for the first time—he had waited 40 years for the translators to complete their work!

Since watching that moment, my uncle hasn't been the same. It sparked the formation of a group called Every Tribe Every Nation (ETEN) and a goal to see the Bible accessible in every heart language. ETEN was a catalyst for gathering Bible translation agencies and resources partners in order to bring about greater collaborative and collective impact. The group did research to figure out how long it would take to

**TECHNOLOGY IS PROVIDING
BACKEND COMPONENTS
THAT ARE MAKING THE
TRANSLATION FASTER,
BETTER QUALITY, AND
MORE COST-EFFECTIVE.**

complete every language in the world. The estimate was 125 years.

But, this was too long. So, ETEN has sought to be strategic, considering how that number could actually be attainable within this lifetime. Ultimately, because of new technology, and in large part a willingness to cooperate, portions of the Bible will now be accessible to every language by 2033.

How did technology take 110 years off the estimated timeline? Beyond providing new formats, such as digital, audio, and visual means of engaging with Scripture, technology is providing back-end components that are making the translation faster, better quality, and more cost-effective.

There's a new collaborated software program called Paratext, which is the world's leading software application for assisting in the Bible translation process. The program provides aid to translators so they can have an accurate translation based on original texts. Until a few years ago, there wasn't one centralized resource that was used by all translators to ensure the process could run as smoothly and be as accurate as possible.

This big data is also helpful for tracking progress and determining what languages still need to be completed. Coordination and shared data helps ensure that agencies aren't working on the same translation.

This data has also helped raise awareness about the need for Bible translation and allows people to get involved. Through a new website, illumiNations. Bible, anyone can look up the languages that have yet to be translated. It took unprecedented unity among Bible translation agencies, sharing their data for the greater good, to make this possible. This collaboration is accomplishing ETEN's mission of "partnering to provide God's Word in everyone's heart language in a format they can engage with, so their lives may be transformed."

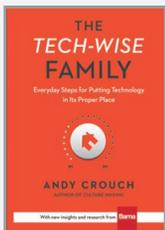
The work of ETEN is visually represented in the illumiNations room at Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. The circular room is filled with shelves of roughly 6,000 books on display. Each book represents a language. A brown Bible represents the languages that have a Bible translation. And a yellow book with blank pages sits on the shelf as a representation of the languages that still don't have a translation. Even though there are currently more yellow books on display, there will soon be a shift as translations are completed.

While these partnerships and technologies are making it possible to complete the task of translation, it's the local church and the body of Christ who will help bring it to fruition through support. By going to illumiNations. Bible, each person can find a translation and sponsor a verse, chapter, book, or entire Bible. Together, let's support the hundreds of other shopowners who are making it possible for all people to engage with the Bible. ★

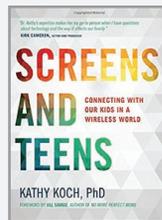
LAUREN MCAFEE serves as corporate ambassador for Hobby Lobby.

ULTIMATELY, BECAUSE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY, AND IN LARGE PART A WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE, PORTIONS OF THE BIBLE WILL NOW BE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERY LANGUAGE BY 2033.

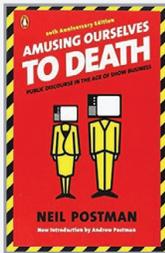
RESOURCES



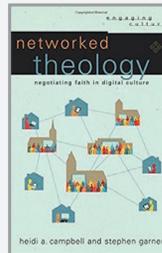
The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place
Andy Crouch
 Baker Books, 2017



Screens and Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in a Wireless World
Kathy Koch, Ph.D.
 Moody Publishers, 2015



Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business
Neil Postman
 Penguin Books, 2005



Networked Theology: Negotiating Faith in Digital Culture
Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner
 Baker Academic, 2016



The Next Story: Faith, Friends, Family, and the Digital World
Tim Challies
 Zondervan, 2015



Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture, and Computer Technology
Derek C. Schuurman
 InterVarsity Press, 2013



12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You
Tony Reinke
 Crossway, 2017



More resources available at ERLC.com



Equipping You On The Go

Listen now on your favorite podcasting app



It's often hard to find the time to stay up-to-date on the latest news and the cultural, moral and ethical issues of our day. Our podcasts provide on-the-go access to teaching and information you want from trusted Christian leaders.

Available on ERLC.COM





THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY COMMISSION
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

WASHINGTON, D.C.

505 2nd St, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
202-547-8105

ONLINE

[f](https://www.facebook.com/erlcsbc) /erlcsbc
[@erlc](https://twitter.com/erlc)
[@erlcsbc](https://www.instagram.com/erlcsbc)
www.ERLC.com

NASHVILLE

901 Commerce St, Ste 550
Nashville, TN 37203
615-244-2495