Central Peninsula Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Trending Now: Technology
Genesis 1:27–28
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series: Trending Now

Our topic today in our Trending Now series is technology. To be honest, it's a bit strange I'm the one speaking on this subject because those who work with me know I'm not exactly the most skilled when it comes to using technology! But still, like most of you, I have smart phone. I'm even on Facebook, watch *Netflix* and use Google docs. Better yet, I'm preaching today from an iPad to prove I'm not a complete Luddite!

Do you know what that is? A Luddite is a person who's opposed to or critical of technology. It comes from an event in the early 1800's in England. Weavers were upset that new technology was making their trade obsolete. As England became more industrialized, machines were doing many of the jobs previously done by humans, which meant many of those humans could no longer make a living. So some workers got together and organized under the leadership of a man named Ned Ludd to fight these new factories. Eventually this movement spread throughout the world and these protesters were called Luddites. Today we're not sure if Ned Ludd even existed, but Luddism sure does! There may even be a little Luddite in you. Luddites aren't against technology per se; they use it, but they're cautious about it. They don't fear technology itself, but they do fear some of the effects it can have on our lives.

Today I want to talk about technology from the perspective of the Bible. I'm sure you know the Bible says nothing directly about computers or social media. But let's think of technology more broadly. Technology is the creative activity of using tools to transform God's creation for practical purposes. We create technology to help us reach beyond what we could do without it. Many of you are watching this message at our North and South campuses because of technology. Technology is all around us. Even the glasses I'm wearing wouldn't be possible apart from it. Technology is so deeply woven into the fabric of our lives we barely notice it's there. It impacts the way we think and relate to each other. Those are things the Bible says a lot about.

Technology and the Creation Mandate

So let's start with the positive and go back to the beginning of creation. In Genesis 1:27-28 we read:

> **"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"**

We see here God is a creator; he makes things. And the pinnacle of his creation is he creates men and women in his image. What does that mean? Part of it means we too will create and even rule, as he says. This is called "the creation mandate." Just as God created, we create. God has given humans the ability to think, to come up with remarkable ideas, to be innovative. Technology is just the practical result of the creative process. As we rule over the world around us and bring our ingenuity to bear on the problems we face, we're actually reflecting something of the image of God, and that's a good thing. It's part of how we fulfill that mandate God gave to Adam and Eve, to *"be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish and the birds and every living creature."* This mandate includes developing the social world: building families, schools, cities, governments and laws. It also means harnessing the natural world: planting crops, building bridges, designing computers, composing music. Technology is just the outgrowth of the creation mandate.

With that there are so many wonderful things it does for us. Before 1830 when technology allowed us to travel by "rail way," you couldn't get from one place to another any faster than a horse a can run. International travel hasn't only allowed us to see the world, but it's allowed the gospel to spread at a far faster pace. Even something like Facebook or Snapchat allows us to connect with a struggling friend and give them the encouragement they need to keep going. The printing press improved literacy and enabled the Bible to be distributed far and wide. Things like electricity, indoor plumbing and farming technology have all made life better for a lot of people.

The smart people who come up with these new technologies are living out the creation mandate. And this is true whether they know and love Jesus or not. There's something called God's common grace, which is the grace he extends to all people. In the book of Acts Paul says to the unbelievers in Athens: *"He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy"* (Acts 14:17). That same grace allows people to create, invent and enjoy things that are good for humanity, whether they know and love him or not.

Technology Has Been Tainted By the Fall of Man

So our ability to create technology is a good and a positive thing that reflects the image of God. But we also need to recognize we live on the other side of Genesis 3. In Genesis 3 we see humanity rejecting God's good purpose for our lives, and that affected everything. Humans were now alienated from God. Our very nature is now bent against God and his perfect will for our lives. God even put a curse on his creation, saying to the man, *"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life"* (Gen. 3:17). So now everything is distorted and warped. The things we create to help us master the creation now try to master us.

It's a few chapters later we get the first example of technology in the Bible, in the hands of one of the Cain's descendants. Cain himself murdered his brother Abel, and his descendants *"forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron"* (Gen 4:22). And that's not presented as entirely positive.

Then you get the first major building project in the history of humanity with the Tower of Babel, which again isn't a positive thing. Remember how the people said, *"Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth"* (Gen. 11:4). That's technology used to exert independence from God; making a name for ourselves apart from him. Much later, Israel was warned by God not to trust in the latest technology in war. The psalmist wrote, *"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God"* (Ps 20:7).

The strange thing is in a world cursed by sin, technology becomes increasingly important, enabling us to regain some control and fulfillment in our lives. Think about it:

- A sinless world had no need of medicine, but a fallen world required the development of medical technologies.

- A sinless world had no need of weapons, but a fallen world required the development of weapons.

- A sinless world provided for all our basic needs, but a fallen world required the development of technologies to help keep us warm and cool in hostile climates, and herbicides to prevent our crops from being choked by weeds.

Technology helps us deal with the effects of the fall, but technology can also become an idol in our lives. Tim Challies in his book, *The Next Story*, says this: "The things we create to assist us in overcoming the consequences of the curse also seek to dominate us, drawing our hearts away from God rather than drawing us toward him in dependence and faith." An idol is anything more important to you than God, anything that captures your heart and imagination more than God, anything you trust to give you what only God can give, anything so important to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living.

Technology has a greater-than-average risk of being turned into an idol because it's so powerful in extending our abilities and what we're able to achieve—it promises to help make us a little more like God and overcome our humanness. In our desire to master the world, we build driverless cars, design spaceships to Mars, explore ways to extend life in perpetuity. The underlying assumption is human ingenuity will solve all our problems, that reliance on faith is an antiquated, unintelligent, and foolhardy approach to life. Technology becomes an idol when we start to believe humanity's hope is found in more and better technology rather than God, and when we measure human progress, not by the state of our hearts, but by new technology.

In 2002 the National Science Foundation and Department of Congress teamed up to create a report to look at how technology could impact the future. Here is their conclusion: "Understanding the mind and brain will enable the creation of a new species of intelligent machine systems that can generate economic wealth on a scale hitherto unimaginable. Within a half-century, intelligent machines might create the wealth to provide food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care, a clean environment, and physical and financial security for the entire world population. Intelligent machines may eventually generate the production capacity to support universal prosperity and financial security for all human beings. Thus, the engineering of mind is much more than the pursuit of scientific curiosity. It's more even than a monumental technological challenge. It's an opportunity to eradicate poverty and usher in a golden age for all humankind." If that's true, who needs God? That's a vision of humanity that's devoid of God and in which technology has become our savior.

Technology can be an idol in itself or it can enable other idols, such as my pride, as I project an image of living the most exciting life imaginable on Instagram. The man with lust as an idol will use technology to enable and enhance his idolatry. The woman who makes an idol of the love of things can now use her computer and internet to engage in obsessive online shopping.

The basic principle to remember is this: technology by itself is neither overwhelmingly good nor inherently evil, but it can draw your heart away from God. It can enable you to rely on your own abilities rather than trusting God. It's not the technology itself that's good or evil; it's what we use it to do and what we allow it to do to us. We should all be more thinking in our attitude to technology; not to reject it outright, nor to embrace it unquestioningly. Instead, to try to see beyond the superficial and to think a bit more about how it affects us. We should use technology but not let it use us.

How Can We Use Technology and Not Let It Use Us?

Let me try to get practical here. How can we use technology rather than let technology use us? There's so much I could say here but I'll limit myself to five things.

Community

First, let's talk about community. Technology is redefining community, and not always in good ways. It used to be your community was defined by physical geography—where you lived with your family, where you worked, where you went to church. So if you wanted to connect with somebody, you'd gather in a place. Now we don't connect in a place, but as we sit alone in our home or office or at Starbucks. More and more our community is a virtual one defined by common interests. You email or text me as an individual, or we chat online, and it's all cut off from my geographical context. It's much less daunting to send a text message to someone than to look them in the eye and give them my full attention. This is one of the reasons why as a culture we find church such hard work—it's so much easier to connect online or download a sermon. In a world where meeting together physically in one place is less interesting, we need to figure out why bother being part of a church community with face to face relationships. Don't let technology keep you from real relationships with real flesh and blood people in real places. Remember God sent his Son to us in the flesh. God didn't shout a message from heaven, he sent his Son.

Truth

Second, let's talk about truth. Technology is trying to redefine truth. How do we know what's true? Wikipedia says it's all about consensus. Google and Facebook say it's all about relevance. So we see more and more content from the friends we engage with and agree with and less from others and it's all very self-reinforcing. Harvard educator Howard Gardner says this: "The new digital media has ushered in a chaotic state of affairs. Thanks to their predominance, we encounter a mélange of claims and counterclaims; an unparalleled mixture of creations, constantly being revised; and an ethical landscape that's unregulated, confusing, and largely unexamined. How to determine what is truth when we can all present ourselves on social network sites any way we want; how to ascertain what's beautiful when a photograph by a once-acknowledged master can be endlessly edited on Photoshop. How to arrive at goodness—the right course of action—when it is so easy to circulate unsubstantiated rumors about another person's life." As Christ-followers we believe in something called revelation found in Scripture, which often clashes with consensus and doesn't necessarily seem all that relevant to an outsider. But it's the ultimate truth, and it's supremely relevant because it's about our eternal future. So don't let technology redefine truth. Truth is found in the Word of God.

Distraction

Third, let's talk about distraction. I'm dealing here specifically with technology as it relates to our digital devices: smart phones, computers, and of course, the internet. These things can cause us to be in a constant state of distraction. If we allow it to, our technology can really begin to own us, with all the beeps, buzzes and notifications that vie for our attention and drag us away from focusing on the people right in front of us. As a result, we're less and less able to concentrate for long periods of time, which leads to shallow thinking and shallow living. Have you ever felt your phone vibrate only to find there's no message there? 68% of cell owners experience phantom vibrations! As a result of all this, nobody just sits and thinks anymore. We get anxious and fidgety if we have to sit with our own thoughts with nothing to distract us.

So how do we develop habits of personal devotion like spending quality time in God's word and praying? How many times have I sat down to read the Bible, only to find myself checking my phone because some idea has occurred to me part way through, and before I know it I've forgotten what I was reading. Our hearts long for that little beep, so we leave the volume turned up. What does it say about my own priorities that I'm more excited to know if anybody has sent something to my inbox than I am to hear from the Creator of the Universe? I challenge you to turn off your phone and alerts while you spend time with God or while you sit down to dinner with your family. Remember Mary and Martha when they had Jesus over for dinner? Martha was distracted by so many things, but Mary sat at his feet and listened to him, and I'll bet her phone was turned off!

Addiction

Of course, related to this problem of distraction is the problem of addiction. We have middle school and high school students here this morning. Most of you spend about nine hours a day using technology. That's more time than you may even spend sleeping, and more time than you spend with your parents and teachers. And the nine hours doesn't include time spent using technology at school or doing homework. But it's not just a problem for you, it's also an issue for your parents. There's actually a thing today called The Center for Internet Addiction, and it's not just about kids. They say if we answer yes to five of the following questions we have a problem:

- Do you feel preoccupied with the Internet?

- Do you feel the need to use the Internet with increasing amounts of time to achieve satisfaction?

- Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop Internet use?

- Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use?

- Do you stay online longer than originally intended?

- Have you jeopardized or risked the loss of significant relationship, job, educational or career opportunity because of the Internet?

- Have you lied to family members, therapist, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet?

- Do you use the Internet as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression?

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *"'I have the right to do anything,' you say—but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything'—but I will not be mastered by anything"* (1 Cor. 6:12). We have the right to use technology; it's even beneficial at times to do so. But, if you're being mastered by it, if it's using you, then admit it and take action. Maybe you need to take a regular Sabbath day away from digital devices. Maybe as a working dad or mom, you should choose not to bring your computer home from work.

Accountability

Finally, let's talk about accountability. Many years ago the British war hero Admiral Lord Nelson said every man became a bachelor once he was beyond Gibraltar. Gibraltar is the giant rock that juts into the Mediterranean Sea, guarding against anyone who'd want to sail in or out. It represented the edge of the civilized world. When a ship sailed from Gibraltar, the men aboard were heading into the unknown, beyond civilization, with all its rules and religion and morality. Here every man was a bachelor; free from the watchful eye of society so he could behave however he pleased. In those days, morality was closely tied to visibility. People lived in close-knit communities, where one person always knew what another was up to. This provided motivation to do what was right and avoid the wrong. When visibility was lost, as with those who sailed beyond Gibraltar, so too was accountability.

That's the challenge we face with life after the digital explosion. We spend much of our lives beyond Gibraltar, beyond accountability through visibility, able to say and do and see and enjoy whatever our hearts desire. This is especially true of children. In previous generations, if children wanted to be in touch with a friend, they had to call them on the home phone which might be answered by a parent. So parents were gatekeepers of their children's social lives. But technology now offers kids independence from their parents' involvement in their social lives. Kids like this, but parents generally don't, although some secretly enjoy the fact they don't have to bother to entertain their children.

But whether you're a teenager or an adult, I encourage you build in accountability to your use of technology. Each of us should have someone—a husband or wife, a parent, a brother or sister—who has access to everything we do online. There are also really helpful tools you can use as a parent to monitor your kid's internet use. Use parental controls. Use Covenant Eyes, a software program to create visibility with what you look at online. We've placed some resources for kids and parents on our website. Talk constantly to your kids about this.

Let me summarize:

Technology is a good, God-given gift. Created in God's image, we have a mandate and a desire to create, and technology is one example of human creation. I challenge you young people here to use technology to serve God's purposes on earth. My friend Josh Kwan who attends this church did this by creating an app called "Abide" which is a mobile app designed to pull people into practicing spiritual disciplines. All of that is good!

But like everything else in creation, technology is subject to the curse. Our technologies can become idols and compound our rebellion against God. In fact, technology often is an enabler of other idols in our lives. So use technology, but don't let it use you. Refuse to worship at the feet of technology. We have only One Savior. We worship at the feet of the One who was raised from the dead. Technology has never done that, and it never will.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.