The Impact of Technology on the Christian Life

by Tony Reinke

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Joel Woodruff: **Tony, as we look today at the impact of technology on the Christian life, definitions are important. Could you define for us the word technology and summarize what that means in today's age.**

Tony Reinke: It's applied technique. So it's an art. It's a science. It is a way of engaging with God's creation in a way to coerce it or move it or change it or perfect it or beautify it or do something with it using technique. So I don't see a huge distinction between the tool and technique, a dichotomy that some historians will see. I think tools and technologies kind of all blend into this long history of technology that goes to space travel and begins with the creation of hammers. I think of it as one long trajectory, one long story of applied technique.

When you look at the story of David and Goliath, for example, in the Old Testament, you see a face-off between two technologists. Goliath was more like Robocop, covered head to toe with metal, like the greatest technologically outfitted human on the planet. He had plundered all these different metal things from different nations and then hung them on himself, so he was this pinnacle of technological superiority. But David was not tech-less either. He had a sling. He was a sniper, and he knew, going in on a one-on-one combat mission, that being a sniper is strategically pretty smart, so you don't have a technologist and an anti-technologist. You have two guys using technology, different kinds of

technologies, in a one-on-one battle. David proves to be the superior technologist. He has the superior technique. The technique is so small, so tiny that David's sling puts the focus on God and His providence over the whole thing. Nevertheless, he knew how physics worked. He knew how to kill basically as a sniper. So that's one of the first stories we see of what I would call technologists in the Bible. They're both using technology. They're both using techniques to a certain end.

Joel Woodruff: That's a great story to illustrate technology. I would never have thought about it that way, and I think it helps us frame this. As far as technology, going all the way back to the Stone Age and Iron Age, do you think that in the 20th and 21st centuries technology expansion has been more rapid than at other times in history?

Tony Reinke: It feels more rapid, but in some senses it's not. If you're tracking the unfolding of digital technologies, digital tools, websites and apps and such, it feels very rapid. But in other ways, when you look at technology, it also feels very slow. Like the air conditioner, which I need to live in Phoenix, is basically the same technology that's been around since the late 1950s. It really hasn't improved much since then. So there are certain technologies that seem like, wow, it's just radically changing. And there are other areas where you realize that we're still using older technologies that could be improved, made more efficient. So it depends on how you look at it. If you're looking at Silicon Valley apps, gadgets, wow! Digital photography, electric vehicles, those things—a lot has changed. But there's been such a focus on the digital, on electric, that there are many other fields that have just stalled. There are just different ways to look at it.

Joel Woodruff: That's a good point. I suppose it depends where people are focusing their energies at any given time in history. One thing, at least around here, with artificial intelligence (AI), with cameras everywhere, smartphones everywhere, there is some thought that technology may be getting to the point—like in those sci-fi books—

where it begins to dehumanize the world. In other words, human beings seem to have less importance. There's even this idea that machines are going to take over the world. What do you think about that idea? Do you think technology can be dehumanizing?

Tony Reinke: Oh, it definitely can be dehumanizing. AI is an example one of those things that, if you're not careful, it does shape and form the way you think of what it means to be a human. And AI has a lot of potential benefits, in personal productivity, in national defense, in medicine, in law. There are a lot of ways that AI will eventually be useful in our lives, but there's a sense in which that whole technology is built from a transhumanistic worldview—this idea, as Elon Musk would say, that we are brains in a vat, that's all we are, and everything that we feel, see, touch, that's all just feeling. It's kind of a mirage. The idea that AI is built from this post-humanist worldview—that what you are is basically your consciousness—so just your thoughts are who you are. Everything else is biological. Everything else that gets viruses, that gets broken bones, that gets sick, that has to go the bathroom, that has to go to the hospital— that will eventually die. All of that biological biohazard baggage, we can do away with that. And what we have left is the consciousness. That's who you are, your consciousness.

Of course, C.S. Lewis himself dealt with this in *That Hideous Strength*, one of his great books. Just hammering away at this transhumanist movement that he saw coming right after World War II. It's just amazing how early he saw this coming on. But yeah. There's this idea that I'm going to use AI so that I can think faster. I'm going to plug my brain into a neural link so that I can be interfaced with a computer. Then I can think faster. Then my consciousness could maybe be exhumed from this biological biohazard of a body and can be put in the cloud. And so someday I can live this eternal existence as pure consciousness in the cloud. One of the transhumanist goals to make people live forever is to

make that consciousness a digital thing that can live forever.

Well, as we know from the Bible, from birth to baptism to the Lord's table, to the resurrection from the dead, we are more than just a conscious being. We have this body that God has given us, that frames what He expects from us. We're gendered. We have different races. We have all these different aspects to our bodies that come into play that define who we fundamentally are. And so that AI trajectory that says you're just this human consciousness. Let's make that consciousness faster, sharper, quicker. It's all built on that transhumanist ideology. Transgenderism comes out of that transhumanism; you can see how that dominates and drives everything. So there are benefits to the technologies, but you're exactly right, they can dehumanize us if we begin to think that consciousness is basically what we are. No soul, no body, just consciousness. And it's more complex than that.

***Joel Woodruff*: Yes. So the transhumanist perspective—obviously their view of humankind is quite different from a biblical view. What do you see God's perspective being when it comes to technology? How does God view technology in our world today?**

Tony Reinke: That's a huge question. From Genesis to Revelation, what we see in the Bible is a story of God giving us His creation and then giving us creativity and giving us innovators to engage in that creation to make things, to make new shiny things. And then to take those new shiny things and to love Him with them, to love others with them, and to glorify Him for all the gifts that He's given us. Now, what makes it so challenging is that, for about the past hundred years, the default position of the church has been tech pessimism. It's been Luddism. It's been an anti-technology, dystopian approach that says, "We don't need technology. It's more holy just to reject technology. Any newfangled thing that humans invent, let's thumbs down on it. And that's holy. That's godly."

So we're living with about a hundred years of that buildup, since around World War I, when we started to see the power of our inventions to

kill others at scale. I think that caused a lot of people to step back and wonder what Christians should think about all of this. But I see a very good biblical foundation, from Genesis to Revelation, that would say, instead of just taking a Luddite perspective on these things, we can actually see God's glory in the innovations that we're making. That's the case I try to make in this new book [*God, Technology and the Christian Life*], drawing from about 20 different texts in the Bible. You put them all together to show this point. But it's fairly complex: these fundamental priorities needed to see God's glory and generosity in the technologies we use daily—they have fallen so far by the wayside that they need to be recovered. They need to be brought back into the foreground of the church's consciousness. This is not there right now.

So it is starting with a nearly blank slate and working through text by text to build a vision of technology that is, I believe, more God-centered and more balanced. It sees the dangers of things like transhumanism, but also sees the benefits of the 10,000 technologies that we use every single day that we don't give God glory for. So that's a concern I've tried to correct.

Joel Woodruff: That's great. You talked about this "downer" on technology in Christian circles. I think of certain groups, such as the Amish. You can pick certain technologies you can use, others you can't. I'm sure that applies throughout multiple denominations. What would you say are some of the myths or the misnomers that Christians have about technology? What has produced this idea in the past hundred years?

Tony Reinke: In my book I lay out the 12 myths that I think are pervasive within the church. I heard these as I started traveling around, talking about smartphones and social media. As I was warning of concerns, I was hearing, from parents, pastors, theologians, a response like, "Yeah. Let's just dismiss it. Let's just throw away the iPhone." So I started to make a list of the myths I was hearing, the easy fixes that aren't really fixes. That became the basis for the new book on technology. So there

are many different myths. One of the most common is this idea that God gave us a creation, and we're just supposed to live in it as if it were a garden. We're supposed to look, don't touch. Like bulls in a china shop. Like, "Don't touch anything! This place is made of glass." So if you see tar bubbling up from the sand in the Middle East, look at it, but don't touch it. You know, definitely don't siphon it and refine it and make fossil fuels. If you see uranium, just stand back and look at it. Definitely don't take it, refine it, and create nuclear power. If you see a nuclear fusion reaction happening on the sun, stand back and just adore it, but don't try to do that.

So it leads to this perspective of technology where, even though this globe is loaded with potential, with power, with material possibilities, we're just supposed to look at it and live in a garden—an agrarian type of approach. I see that as one of the myths that's driven this tech pessimism in the church for the past hundred years, whereas I think creation is a place that's full of glory. It's full of all sorts of materials. It's full of 60 elements that we can take out of the ground, refine, and put into a smartphone. We don't make smartphones *ex nihilo*. We make smartphones out of the things that God has given us to make with and the powers He's given us. We're using electricity right now. If somebody's listening to us, watching us right now, they're using electricity. Where did electricity come from? We didn't invent it. God invented it, put it into His creation in the lightning bolt. And it took a long time, but at some point, a guy in Boston proposed, "Maybe that thing shooting out of the sky is the same thing that, when I touch you and zap you with a little shock . . . I think this is electricity." And the Brits laughed at Ben Franklin and said, "You're ridiculous. That's not electricity. That's some fire in the sky that can coexist with water. We don't know what it is, but it's a fire and water mix somehow in the heavens." And Franklin said, "No, I think this is electricity," and so he put his kite up in the sky and put his knuckle to the key and proved to the world that God invented electricity. And here we are using EVs, batteries, power coming through our walls, through our batteries. We're using all of this electrical
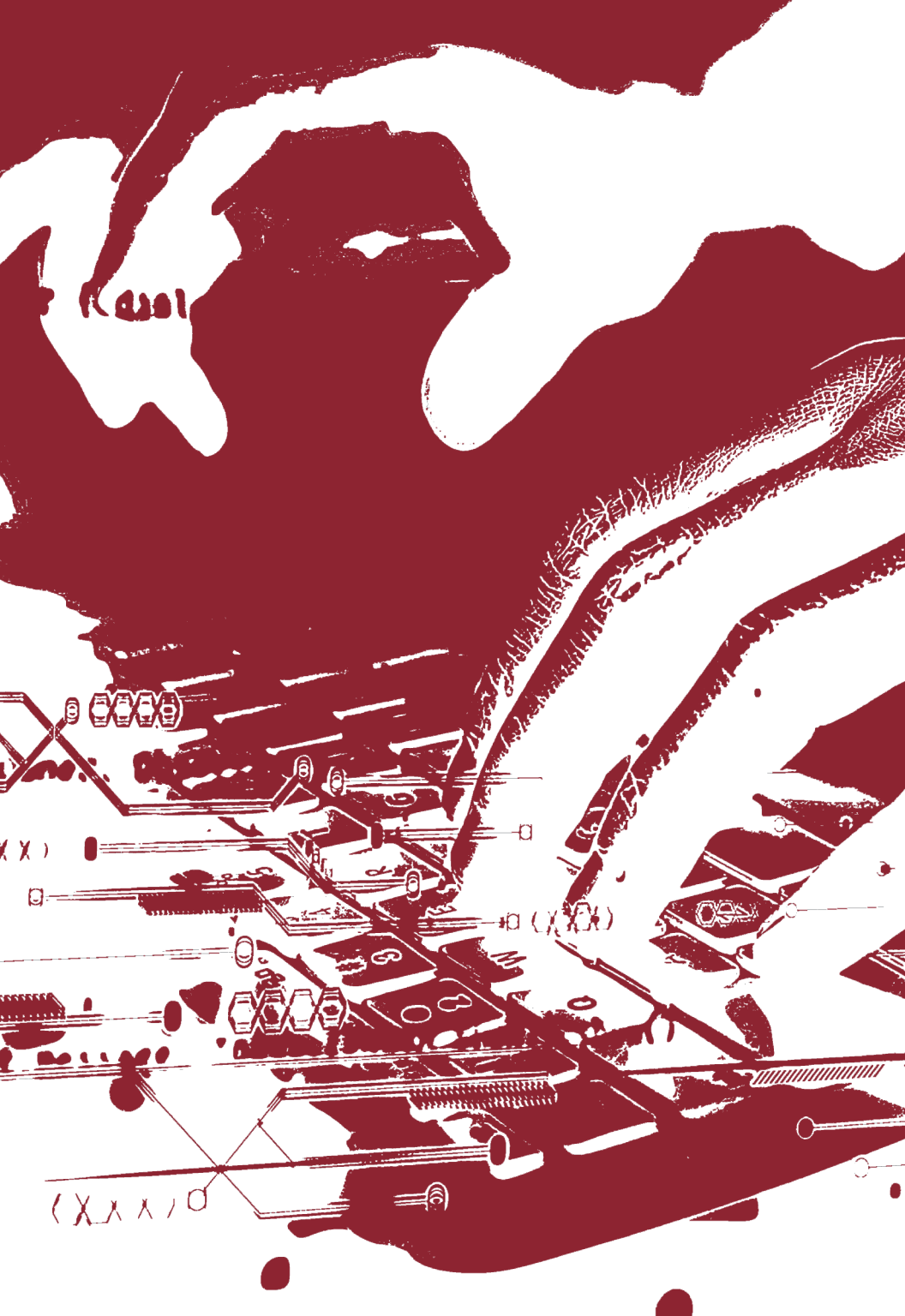
technology, and it is all a gift from God. He gave us electricity as a power source to harness and then to use.

There is a huge backstory, because—what Ben Franklin did—he created a huge theological debate in the church: are we supposed to harness the lightning? Or is the lightning just God's providence speaking to us? It would take a long time to fill out that fascinating story. But the bottom line is: we have electricity because God invented electricity, put electricity into His creation, and then He taught us how to capture it. And that's what we've done.

As you look at more and more of the resources of this creation—the potential powers that God has put into it, all the things that we can make, all the things we can't make—there are way more things that we think we can make that we can't, that won't work. When you look at the number of start-ups in Silicon Valley, 95 percent of them will fail in the first five years. When you look at patents—I think it costs $10,000 now to file a patent—about 97 percent of US patents will never make a penny of profit. So the number of things that we can actually invent and cause to be fruitful is very small. So there are all sorts of limiters in place that God has put—not only natural laws, but also economic factors, and other factors—that limit what we can make. So we have this expansive place where we can go, this playground of materials and powers, and those are constrained by many different things.

In the end, that's what I want Christians to see: not creation as this huge garden, but as a playground that God has given us to go and to invent and to create and to glorify Him in the inventions that we use every single day.

Joel Woodruff: **That's a great analogy. It's interesting. I think, in the scientific world, you have the misnomer that most scientists are atheists. I think over 50 percent of physicists have some kind of theistic worldview. But there has been this tendency to view the world and science as being outside of the religious circles. And yet it's the very understanding of a Creator who created the world and**

natural laws and things that God put in place that allowed modern science to come about. Do you want to say more about that and how that impacts technology?

Tony Reinke: Yeah. I would love to write another book and just talk about the Christians in science over the years. Christians have been behind a number of really important technological advances and breakthroughs.

My argument in the book is that I don't need to follow that line of thinking to show you that God has filled the world with innovators. I can show that from Genesis 4, in tracing out Cain's lineage. You have Cain and Abel, two brothers. Cain kills his brother. It's the first death of a human in the first creation. This is a cold-blooded murder. This is premeditated. Maybe he used a farming tool. We don't know. But Cain is now marked as this guy who is a thug. He's a murderous thug. So what should happen to him? According to the law that comes later, if you shed a man's blood in a field, your blood should be shed as well. So Cain is primed to be executed. God should send down vengeance on Cain and judge him. Instead, God says, "I'm going to put a mark on Cain. Don't touch him. Don't beat him up. Don't execute him. Don't hurt him. I'm going to protect his life." Why? Because He's going to protect the lineage of the progeny that's going to come out of Cain's story.

The industries of cattle breeding, what amounts to early genetics, trying to figure out how to raise different types of animals to make them strong, the music industry, and then all metal working—those three industries will all come from Cain's great, great, great, great grandchildren. We see that in Genesis 4. So I think already, from page 2 or 3, we see that God has a story for human innovation that is not exactly the story of His church. He's going to use Cain's rebellious lineage to introduce into the world innovators who are going to change how we think of industry, how we think of cattle herding, of genetics, of metallurgy, of music making.

That already sets the stage for what we read later, like in Isaiah 27: how does the farmer know how to raise crops? Because his God, God the

Creator, is teaching him how to do it with the techniques of how to plant, how to harvest. All of those techniques God is teaching the farmer in Isaiah 28. That is an amazing text to read. Then you come to the most mind rattling verse in the whole Bible on technology, and that's Isaiah 54:16, a verse you have to take slowly. You have to take it in reverently. But right there, God is saying He is going to create the creators of war weapons. He's not talking about Christians, believers, nation of Israel. He's talking about war weapons makers who will be the product of His ingenuity. He makes the innovators who make the innovations that shape the future. And that's one of the ways that God communicates to His people, "Hey, I'm in charge of the future. You know why I'm in charge of the future? Because I create Elon Musk. Because I create Steve Jobs. Because I create the innovators in the world. They don't have to be Christians to come under My reign. I am the One who creates the creators." This is one of the fascinating things you see in the Bible: the reason why a nation would have a lot of innovators is because God has blessed, or cursed, that nation with a lot of innovators. God is the one who is at the lever of controlling the volume of innovators in any given culture at any given time.

So don't we have to go and try to search out, "Oh, there's a Christian in Silicon Valley making a new app. Therefore, that app is better than all the other apps." I think God has a place and a plan in His story to use rebellious sinners who will make new innovations that God is going to leverage for His glory, hack for His glory, or otherwise show His generosity in them. So that whole—I want to get in front of that line of thinking, "Well, we can trust that technology if a Christian made it, but if a non-Christian made it, then we can't trust it."

Now, we have to be discerning, but we also need to see throughout that storyline in Scripture that God has a place to show us that some of these amazing industries that we still rely on, cattle breeding, music making, metallurgy, we can trace back to the forefathers of those industries, who were Cain's great, great, great grandsons. The Bible wants us to

appreciate that. For some reason—I can't explain why—God has a redemptive story line that takes center stage in the Bible, and within it; He records an innovative story line from Genesis to Revelation. We see that in city building, in technology making. That's a theme that's going to run all throughout Genesis to Revelation.

Joel Woodruff: That's powerful. And important, again, to see God's blessing on all humanity and working through all peoples, whether believer or not. So there are these very positive benefits of technology. You see it in humanity, that God created us to develop and apply techniques and technology. However, there are, in our world today, a lot of concerns. What do you see as the possible downsides of technology in general? If you were to look at the danger zones, what would those look like?

Tony Reinke: Yeah. The danger with technology, going back to Psalm 20, is that we will put our hope in the technology to save us and deliver us. So if your life is one for which you say, "I don't need God. I've got my smartphone. I've got medical innovation and a hospital five minutes away from me. I don't need God because I've got all these technologies around me that bolster my life." I think that's where most Americans would be. They feel so secure. They have an insulated home with heating and air conditioning, and there's a military that keeps them safe. And most diseases we can wipe out pretty easily. Most medical challenges can be dealt with in an ER. We have all of these things that—we just lean on them. We put our hope in them. They won't let us down. Until they do.

In Psalm 20 and throughout the entire Bible, we're seeing this, that the problem with humans is that we take our technologies, and, instead of glorifying God for them, we make gods of them. We say, "This is our salvation," and this goes back to the transhumanism. "Who's going to save us?" A couple of geeks in lab coats in Silicon Valley are going to save us, because they're going to somehow exhume this mental faculty

out of us so that we can live forever. So we put our hope and trust in Silicon Valley. We put our hope and trust in the makers of technologies to be our savior and our deliverer. That's always the problem. This is a challenge for everyone. In the Old Testament, this is a challenge for all the nations. This is a challenge for God's own nation in Deuteronomy 8. Moses is getting his people, God's people, ready to enter the Promised Land. He says that land is going to be flowing with milk and honey. The land flowing with milk and honey is sort of the Promised Land's name, milk and honey. Lots of milk. Lots of honey. But what we don't typically hear is that it's also a land flowing with iron and copper. That's what Deuteronomy 8:9 talks about. There's a material capacity within the Promised Land. As the nation of Israel finds that iron and finds that copper and finds ways to mix and match and make tin and the like, they're going to create a whole industry of new tools. God says, "When you start doing that, when you make these cities and this economy and you make all of these things prosper, don't forget to glorify Me in it or you're going to be just like all the other nations." That's the challenge with our technologies. Do we see God's generosity in it? Or do we not see His generosity? That is a challenge for everyone who lives in Silicon Valley. That's a challenge for everyone who goes to church on Sunday. Do we see God's glory in it, or are we blind to it? Do we just use the ten thousand innovations we use every single day in a way that ignores God?

I think that's the challenge we're up against—that the church has sort of imbibed, over time, this idea that it's okay to just be God-ignoring when it comes to technology. But we're trying to undo that and reopen eyes to the generosity of what God has given us, even to do this recording. I mean, this recording right now requires amazing advances in cameras, computers, Wi-Fi, electricity. We're using all sorts of innovations right now; the temptation is to just take it all for granted, like this is all just humans doing human stuff. But I think God would break in and say, "No, no. These are all gifts from Me and My generosity, so that you can have this conversation, so the audience can watch and listen. Glorify Me

in the gifts that I've given you in My creation." That's really where the challenge is at, trying to see God's generosity in it all.

Joel Woodruff: **It reminds me of the passage, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but my trust is in the Lord." It certainly fits in that regard.**

Tony Reinke: Psalm 20. Yep.

Joel Woodruff: **Yep. Right out of that. How do you see the story of the Tower of Babel impacting this idea?**

Tony Reinke: It's a great story. I think that's the default story that most people go to. If you said, "What does the Bible say about technology?" Somebody would think, "Let's go to the Tower of Babel, and that's it," you know? God is kind of aloof, paying attention to His own things, and then every once in a while, He looks back and says, "Oh, what are they doing? I've got to step in and intervene." I think a lot of people have that kind of worldview when it comes to technology. Should we be doing Space X? Should we go into Mars? Like, "I don't know if we should be doing this, but eventually God will turn around and pay attention and come in and disrupt what He needs to."

The Tower of Babel is actually a more complex story than that, in that what we see there is basically God wants 100,000 cities all over the globe. He doesn't just want one city. And so He steps in, and He breaks up that one city in order to create 100,000 cities all across the world, the Tokyos, the Moscows, the Beijings. He wants to create cities all over the globe, so He's not opposed to cities. He's not opposed to buildings. All of those things. If we read the story wrongly, we'll think, "Well, God's opposed to all of those things," but He's not. He's opposed to humanity saying, "We can construct a way of salvation that is godless." That's what He's against. So the theory I put forward in my book is that the Tower of Babel is constructed with tar, waterproof tar, and stones; they expect that God is going to send another flood and try to wash them

away for their disobedience, and so they're trying to create a waterproof tower to get above the water. But God then comes in and does something unforeseen. He instills in them different languages. He is going to create a plethora of languages. He's going to invent all the languages that we can think of all on that day, and that's going to spread the people across the globe, to go build 100,000 cities.

I think this idea that God was fed up with human technology, came down, and squashed it, is a misreading of the text—that God has sort of checked out and looks back over His shoulder every once in a while to see what kind of a mess we're getting ourselves into next. There's much more to the story, from Genesis 4, from Cain's lineage, to Isaiah 28 and the farmers, Isaiah 54, the war weapons makers, and all the way on into Revelation 18 and Babylon. There's a huge story of human innovation that needs to be told along with that story in Genesis. So it's part of the story, but it's not the sum total of it.

Joel Woodruff: **Some great insights there on the Tower of Babel story. We've been looking at things at a macro level, really, and you've given some great hooks to think about and some good approaches to technology. I wonder if now we can zero in more on our own personal lives and how technology has impacted spiritual life in the past century, although I imagine we could go all the way back to things like the Gutenberg press and see how that changed spiritual attitudes. What are your thoughts on how technology has, over the centuries, impacted the ways we worship and the way we live out our spiritual lives?**

Tony Reinke: That's a great perspective. When the Gutenberg press came along and people could have Bibles, at first you could have a Bible in a regional parish, then each church could have its own Bible, and then eventually, most if not all Western Christians can have a Bible, and now it's free online. It's an amazing opening of the Word to God's people,

which is a huge blessing. That brings with it challenges. Every time you have these sort of advances, they bring challenges, right? Everybody can go to the Word and come up with their own interpretation of what they think is right, because they have the text right there in front of them. So it's not so easy, as just—if you have a Bible in your hand, you're always going to make the right interpretations or applications of the text. So yeah. Technology is always changing us. The question is whether it's changing us in a good way—making us more loving of God and of others—or whether it's making us more self-centric, selfish, and the like. That's always been one of the litmus tests we can bring to our technologies. Am I becoming a more loving person?

I've talked with a lot of companies that are making AI, even in the Christian AI space. If you have a question, you just go into chatbot, ask that chatbot your question, and you'll get a biblical response spit out. I think a lot of what we're seeing with the AI move right now is a misunderstanding of how spiritual formation happens; it takes a long, long process to actually grow as a Christian. A lot of it doesn't happen very quickly. Some of the tools make it seem like, "Oh, if you have a challenge in your life, you're going to find an immediate fix, an immediate answer. Just go to the chatbot and find it." And that's a misunderstanding of how spiritual formation works.

Typically, God is going to send us through seasons of darkness, seasons of pain, seasons when there aren't a lot of answers. There are precious answers that you hold to, but a lot of answers that you won't find. There are seasons where God seems to withdraw from His own children. There are times of pain that we work through and work through with others. That's kind of how He builds in us to be a people who are longing for His return. So it's not as easy as finding a quick fix through AI, which can spit out an immediate response to your question. The spiritual formation that we experience as Christians is a very different type of model. So I think we have to be careful about what our expectations are with technology.

Again, cognitively, we can do very impressive things. With AI, it's going

to get even more powerful. We can become more productive in our jobs. If the forecasts of what AI tools to come prove to be true, each of us will be more productive in our jobs, especially if you have a knowledge job. But that doesn't change the fact that God works in us in His own agricultural pace by seasons, which is much slower. In my book *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*, I go through all of these different 12 ways that technology tries to make us think differently than we should about the Christian life. We have to be careful when it comes to productivity, when it comes to the power of tools, that we don't come to think that the Christian life is easier, more simplified, or more streamlined than it really is. There are lots of cautions to keep in mind when it comes to incorporating technologies into our lives and having an awareness of what God is doing.

Joel Woodruff: I really like that idea of the agricultural seasons of the spiritual life. Of course, you look at the Old Testament festivals, Passover during the barley harvest, Pentecost, the wheat harvest, and Tabernacles, the end of the harvest season and just how those all fit into God's plan and the cycles of a yearly life and our spiritual growth. All the illustrations Jesus uses about being planted and growing and multiplying. So that's really helpful. Maybe it's the wrong analogy, but we used to refer to the microwave world in which we can do something faster. I'm sure today we could use another analogy—how quickly we can even make a phone call in an instant around the world. It's pretty amazing. What are some other ways, then, that you would see that things like cell phones might hinder our spiritual life—in the way we use them, in our families, in our church, in our lives?

Tony Reinke: If you go into your social media feed, typically what you're going to find is people who are like you, who think like you, look like you, are in the same socioeconomic grouping as you. We find a lot of people who are like us, and we follow them. What the local church offers us is a place where we are hanging around people who are very

different ages, different races, different socioeconomic classes, different gender, all these different things. They all come together in this chorus of a community of faith that we need to hear from. Even the elderly and disabled. Cognitively disabled Christians are not in my feed. I don't see them online. I don't hear them online. But they're at my local church, and I see them, I hear them in my local church. So God has put in our lives a whole spectrum of people that He wants us to learn from and grow from in the local church. That's one of those areas where, if you're just sticking to your feed, you're going to hear a lot of people saying the things that you want to hear and who look a lot like you, sound a lot like you. It's just very similar, and that's not healthy. That's one of those areas where we have to have the local church in order to encounter those different people in God's family.

Similarly, that cognitive bias is very, very strong, so that everything I do online is my brain, my brain, my brain. How could I do this faster? Do this more effectively? It's just this focus on the cognitive capacity. When we're together with the people of God on Sunday mornings, there's no edit button. There's no meme. There's no fake image of me that I've created that I want you to see. That is me unfiltered. I am standing before you. When we have a physical presence together in the local church, we sharpen one another, but we also come in a way that's less filtered. I wouldn't say it's totally unfiltered, but it's less filtered. It's more authentic. It's more who we are when we're in face-to-face communication with others, and that's how God intended us to be. He didn't intend us to be merely brains in a vat. We are more than brains in a vat, and we see that in the embodied relationship in the local church. That's why I say, from birth to baptism to the Lord's supper to the resurrection from the dead, we are more than just cognitive. We are soul. We are body. We're all of this together. And in the local church we start to get more and more of a picture of what that looks like, as being part of God's family that is very diverse.

Joel Woodruff: **That's a good admonition for why attending church on Zoom now isn't probably the best, is it? We need to be**

in-person and have that. The technology was nice, and it's nice when you're out of town.

Tony Reinke: And for shut-ins. Shut-ins who can't be there.

Joel Woodruff: . . . and for shut-ins. So the tools can be used for good, but there's the danger of over depending upon those technological tools.

Tony Reinke: Exactly.

Joel Woodruff: When you think about the family: I know for teachers, parents, grandparents, many of us, we see our kids on their smartphones all the time. We have been to restaurants where we see families sitting down for dinner, and they're all looking at their smartphones. There's no conversation. Have you found habits or disciplines that help families, help believers, use technology in positive ways but also set some boundaries—ways to avoid some of those dangers and the lack of interpersonal communication?

Tony Reinke: My wife and I had the rule that there were no smartphones at the dinner table. One can engage something like Covenant Eyes, things that will have some eyes on what type of sources are being accessed through devices. I wrote a whole article on this for Desiring God. If you search the "Desiring God" website, you'll be able to find "Twelve Tips for Parenting in the Digital Age," an article I wrote. I've got a bunch of different ideas there to help Christian parents walk their kids through ages 3–16, whenever you introduce a tablet, some parents at 3, some at 8. There's a huge debate on when a child should get a tablet. Some parents are like never. But I try to help parents walk through the difference between parenting in the home with Wi-Fi versus parenting out of the home with a smartphone. Once you make that line in the sand and you move from a laptop in the home on Wi-Fi to a smartphone that can be used on the web outside the home, you give up a lot of controls.

There are parental controls that are better now than they were a number of years ago, when I was a parent trying to figure this out. But basically, if you can help your child learn digital habits, good habits, in the home, you can sort of discipline them within the home, with a lot of control over what they see. You can use things like the Circle device, something we use. It's a part of a wireless router that cuts the connection to a device based on time limits or content limits. Very easy to control what your child sees in that context. Once you move to the smartphone, it becomes much more difficult, more challenging. Your child needs to have a pretty clear history of being smart digitally, and you need to watch them for a number of years before you graduate to the smartphone. Unfortunately, a lot of parents nowadays outside the church just hand their 10-year-old a smartphone, and that can be a really bad decision.

I've spent a number of years going around doing parenting seminars and giving the tools and the tricks to parents. I came to realize that those tools and those tricks to prohibiting your child from seeing certain things online is sort of . . . You're buying time for something else. That's not the end of parenting to just make sure your kid doesn't see porn. The end of parenting is giving your child a vocational vision and a moral vision that is so compelling they run toward that as the north star of their lives. So yes, set up limits, use Covenant Eyes, do all of those things on devices, on smartphones. Limit what your kids can see. But see that as a buying of time that you need to set for your child a moral and vocational vision that's going to put their eyes up and higher, beyond the drama in their high school relationships. You want to show them, like, "College is coming. What's your major? What do you want to do in this world? What do you want to be? What do you want to accomplish?" And if you can help your child set a vision of what they are to do vocationally and morally, the kind of person they want to be, you can build that into them from an early age.

Once our kids got to be freshmen in high school, we tried to get them on college campuses, just so they could see, "This is coming." Walking

around MIT, "You could be at MIT. Look at the computer labs here. Look at all the amazing research they're doing here. You could be here in four years. You've got to watch the grades. You've got to put in the time." We would buy the sweatshirts. All throughout their high school years, they had college swag. We were trying to point their eyes past high school. What's next? That's where the really hard work of parenting happens. It's not just in the parental controls. It's in setting that vocational and moral vision for your child that's so compelling, that moves them up and beyond the drama and the allure of what's online. That's very hard. But you simply can't fall back on the parental controls as being the end of what parenting is all about. That's not the end.

[Video of the complete version of this talk is available at: The Impact of Technology on the Christian Life. Additional information about the topic of this talk is included in Tony Reinke's book *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* (Crossway, 2022).]

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