

Tech-Wise Living: Flourishing in a Digital Age

McLean Presbyterian Church | Sept. 21, 2024

Today's Road Map

1. How do we consider technology within a biblical framework?

Four-Chapter Gospel	Biblical Values of Technology	Common Values in Technology
Creation	God is in control. We are just the created beings.	We are in control.
	God created us with physical bodies as well as souls and minds. Our bodies are not limitations to be transcended.	Digital selfhood is preeminent.
	Every human being has intrinsic worth and dignity from God, and should be treated as such.	People deserve my outrage and online abuse.
	Technology ultimately glorifies God, the only One who can create something from nothing.	Technology ultimately glorifies man.
Fall	Technology is tainted with sin, in both design and use.	Technology is neutral.
Redemption	Technology is a God-given gift and can be redeemed, in both design and use.	Technology is always bad.
Restoration	As citizens of heaven, not earth, we should not always conform to popular behavior and lifestyles online.	We should do what everyone else is doing online.
	Our tech struggles have an end point: God will complete His good work in us, to present us holy and blameless before Him. He will restore all that we look to technology to satisfy and fulfill.	Our tech struggles are futile.

2. What are our goals for tech-wise living and flourishing?
 - a. What: *Psalm 1, John 15:9-11, John 10:10*
 - b. Why: *2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, 1 Corinthians 10:31*
 - c. How: *Matthew 22:37-40, 2 Corinthians 9:8*
 - d. So what?

3. How can we reflect those goals in the rhythms, spaces, and structures of our lives?
 - a. Rhythms: e.g., *Exodus 20:8-11*
 - b. Physical space
 - c. Structure

Resources for Tech-Wise Living

Faith & Technology

1. James, Samuel D. *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023.
2. Dyer, John. *From the Garden to the City: The Place of Technology in the Story of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2022.
3. Thacker, Jason. *Following Jesus in a Digital Age*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2022.
4. Reinke, Tony. *God, Technology, and the Christian Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021. [available at our church library]
5. Crouch, Andy. *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017. Crouch further developed his thoughts on flourishing in *The Life We're Looking For: Reclaiming Relationship in a Technological World*. New York, NY: Random House, 2022.

Heart Issues in Technology

1. Zylstra, Sarah Eckhoff, ed. *Social Sanity in an Insta World*. Austin, TX: The Gospel Coalition, 2022.
2. Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF) resources on tech (<https://www.ccef.org/resources?topic=technology>)
3. McLean Presbyterian Church Care Ministries (<https://mclean.capitalpres.org/care/>)

Equipping and Discernment in Technology

1. Common Sense Media, accessed Sept. 9, 2024, <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>. [age-based media reviews]
2. Common Sense Education, accessed Sept. 9, 2024, <https://www.commonsense.org/education>. [resources for educators, parents, and students on topics such as digital well-being; media literacy; and artificial intelligence]
3. Youth Toolkit, Center for Humane Technology, accessed Sept. 9, 2024, <https://www.humanetech.com/youth#learn>. [issue and action guides which include the design, motivations, and outcomes of today's social media environment for social media users]

For Parents

1. Cole, Cameron and Anna Meade Harris. "Parenting, Technology, and the Truth," *Rooted Parent*, Podcast series, Sept. 26, 2003 and following. [an excellent series—please see all topics in them! First episode available at <https://rootedministry.com/podcasts/rptech01/>; series available in list format at <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/rooted-parent/id1519302525>]. See also Social Media & Technology, Rooted Ministry, accessed Sept. 9, 2024, <https://rootedministry.com/youth-ministry/resources/social-media-technology/>.
2. Axis Ministries, accessed Sept. 9, 2024, <https://axis.org/>. [searchable resources on technology, social media, and smartphones for parents of teenagers]
3. Haidt, Jonathan. *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*. Penguin Press, 2024.
4. Goff, Sissy and Dave Thomas. "Technology Boundaries for Kids and Families," *Raising Boys & Girls*, Jan. 5, 2021. Podcast video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pvwdszzYdM>.
5. Jenson, Kristen A. *Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids*. Glen Cove Press, 2018.

For Teens & Tweens

1. Crouch, Amy & Andy Crouch. *My Tech-Wise Life: Growing Up and Making Choices in a World of Devices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020. [for teens]
2. Hatton, Kristen. *Face Time: Your Identity in a Selfie World*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017. [for girls ages 11-17]

General Truths to Keep in Mind:

- **God gives me freedom in Christ.** Many of the desires listed are good desires! Technology is used for good, too! I can enjoy the good things technology provides—and have good desires satisfied in them—without being enslaved by my temptations in technology: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).
- **We don’t have to conform to today’s digital lifestyles.** Romans 12:1-2: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
- **Digital flourishing isn’t done alone.** We do this as a community. We ask for accountability among fellow sisters in Christ; we seek professional help where needed; we link arms and seek digital flourishing in Christ together. Galatians 6:2: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”
- **Spiritual piety is not measured by my performance, but comes by grace: by His righteousness in me through being in union with, and abiding in, Christ.** It is God’s grace, not my own strength, that enables me to both *want to* and *live* a digital life that pleases Him (John 15:4; 2 Cor. 9:8; see also Hebrews 4:16, which reminds us that God offers the empowering “grace to help in time of need”).
- **We “do not lose heart” in our struggles involving technology, because we have God’s “surpassing power” in us. He empowers us to fight our battles and renew our inner self for “an eternal weight of glory” we look forward to in heaven. “So we are always of good courage”** (2 Cor. 4-5).

Caveats as You Review this List:

- **The heart issues and the biblical truths here are not comprehensive.** There are plenty of others not on this list, too. Heart issues can overlap, biblical truths can be applied across multiple heart issues, and we can of course have multiple heart issues at play at the same time. *I encourage you to pause, reflect, and prayerfully discern* what heart issues could be at play in your own personal engagement with technology, either on this list or otherwise. Then, *meditate on the biblical truths* that speak most powerfully to you to those issues.
- **The list is intended for educational and informational purposes only.** It does not constitute providing medical advice or professional services, and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a mental health problem or disease. Those seeking personal medical or mental health advice should consult with a licensed mental health or healthcare professional. For counseling and support resources visit <https://mclean.capitalpres.org/care/counseling/>.

HEART ISSUES IN TECHNOLOGY: Flourishing in a Digital Age

Heart Issue	The Temptation/Accusation → Possible Fruit	Biblical Truths
Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ I can feel connected without risk or vulnerability—social media is my imaginary buffer between emotions and reality. ❖ I can feel known and loved (e.g. receive affirmations and acknowledgement from others based on my day-to-day thoughts and feelings). ❖ I need to belong to these set of online relationships/social events to feel like I am part of my “tribe.” <p>→ <i>anxiety; compromising choices; copycat behavior; unrealistic expectations for relational fulfillment</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I don’t have to perform to belong; by grace, I belong to Christ. Ephesians 2:13-16!¹ In my online group, I often perform to belong. The audience is others; the standards are set by the group; they are undefined and changing. Under the gospel, I’m not performing. God is my audience. The standard is the righteousness of God, which I can’t live up to—but God gives me Jesus who lives up to that standard, so that in Him, He is well pleased in me.² ● Out of my union with Christ, I can pray for and seek out healthy, grace-filled community with other people. I can look for communities in my church family or other circles that provide healthier outlets for social connection. ● Because of my union with Christ, it’s okay to be a misfit sometimes. As a citizen of heaven, I <i>will</i> be “left out” in one way or another here on earth. I will not always “fit in” with the pattern of this world (Romans 12:2). ● “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Proverbs 13:20). Are these friends acting wisely? Are they influencing me to behave in ways that are honoring v. dishonoring to God and others? “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers” (Psalm 1:1).
Body Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ My body needs to be “perfect” as dictated by worldly or others’ standards online <p>→ <i>anxiety; discontentment; depression; eating disorders</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I am beautifully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139). ● Because I am “in Christ,” I have the beauty and security of being robed in His righteousness (Isaiah 61). I don’t have to live in shame, or strive to be deemed worthy by others in physical beauty (which is fleeting, Prov. 31:30), but can step out in the security of being eternally loved and accepted in Christ. I do not have to achieve mastery over food and my physical body in order to experience joy or peace. I truly have nothing to earn and nothing to prove.³ ● God is patient and gracious with me. He knows my struggle; he is gracious and patient with those who are hurting; he lifts up those who are cast down (Hebrews 4:15; Isaiah 42:3; Psalm 145:14; Matthew 11:28-30).

¹ “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Eph. 2:13-16).

² Cole, Cameron, co-host. “Parenting, Technology, and the Truth: Social Media Promotes Comparison.” *Rooted Parent*, season 6, episode 6, Rooted Ministries, Nov. 20, 2023, <https://rootedministry.com/podcasts/rptech05/>. Accessed 28 Aug. 2024.

³ Patrick, Amie. “Eating, Body Image, and the Gospel.” *The Gospel Coalition*, Sept. 22, 2013, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/eating-body-image-and-the-gospel/>; see also content and resources listed in Anderson, Shanda. “What Does God Say to Those Who Struggle with Body Image?” *The Gospel Coalition*, July 21, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/q-a-podcast/what-does-god-say-to-those-who-struggle-with-body-image/>.

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<p>Escapism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ I want an easy distraction as a break from burdens of my work, rather than seeking truly restorative rest for my leisure. ❖ I can live in a fantasy online world of no consequences, and/or hide from the hard and uncomfortable parts of my IRL (in real life) world. ❖ Doomscrolling: I can't stop reading large quantities of negative or sensational content (news headlines, TikTok videos) online! <p>→ <i>lethargy; denial; disembodied living; distorted "doom and gloom" perspective of reality (for doomscrolling); anxiety; addictions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The physical/material world is good and God-ordained (Genesis 2:7, 1 John 1). God created me not only with a heart and mind, but with a physical body, meant to be experienced IRL (in real life). ● God gives me the power to handle my real-life demands, so I can face them with Him: "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Peter 1:3). ● God gives me a spiritual family to support me when I am weak, and when I need help. I can ask for help and build strong, mutual support networks in my church family. (Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.") ● I can intentionally consider what it means to truly Sabbath/rest in healthy rhythms, rather than simply turning to what will "turn off" work, abate exhaustion, or be immediately pleasurable but not truly restorative (<i>see also Scriptures on rest in Immediate gratification</i>). ● God is ultimately victorious, and He promises peace, hope, and sufficient grace for His followers here on earth. "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day" (Prov. 4:18); "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27).
<p>Identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ I can craft my own identity apart from the real world (identity fabrication). ❖ I measure my worth based on others' perception of me online (likes, dislikes, followers, etc.). <p>→ <i>anxiety; fear of people; pride or self-loathing (feelings of guilt or worthlessness)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● My identity is in Christ, not others' affirmation or approval of me. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). I can trust in God rather than fear man, which "will prove to be a snare" (Proverbs 29:25). ● I am worse off than I know and more loved than I can imagine in Christ. No matter how others perceive me or how awful I know I can be, I have security in God's inconceivably boundless (Romans 8:38-39) love for me. ● I am an embodied being, created for the physical world, not just a virtual one (<i>see verses under Escapism</i>). My virtual identity, not just my physical one, should be pleasing to God (1 Peter 1:15) and consistent in integrity (Proverbs 12:22).

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<p>Immediate gratification / “easy everywhere” distraction / addictive tendencies</p>	<p>❖ I just want the dopamine (“feel-good”) hits at the expense of my other responsibilities, or as a quick-fix coping mechanism to stress, difficulty, or pain.</p> <p>→ <i>lethargy/indolence; less ability to focus; tech-related addictions</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Beware the sluggard in Proverbs! See, e.g. Proverbs 6:6, 13:4, 15:9, 21:25 on the foolishness of sloth versus diligence and good stewardship. ● Like leaky cisterns (Jeremiah 2:13), my dopamine hits will not ultimately satisfy, and can instead push me to seek more. Studies show that my brain rewires to restore balance after dopamine hits, leading to craving for more thrills.⁴ ● God not only asks me to be a good steward of my resources; He also gives me strength to manage them well. See the parables of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21), and see also 2 Corinthians 9:8 (“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”). ● I can find healthier ways of feeling gratified and restored/rested from work. God can give me insight as to what is truly restorative so that I can be rested and ready, when appropriate, to return to my labors. He is a God who instituted rhythms of rest for His people (Exodus 20:8) and offers true rest in the finished work of the cross (Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”)
<p>Materialism</p>	<p>❖ I must have what other influencers/online friends have, or are selling online!</p> <p>→ <i>coveting; envy; idolizing material things</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rather than desiring the lesser things... “You shall not covet...” (Exodus 20:17). ● ...Lord, may I desire the better things, that which really should capture my hearts and desire: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21; see also Matthew 6:33). ● I can be content in any situation—whether facing plenty or hunger, abundance or need—because of Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13). ● I have the power of self-control over my desire for things, “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Timothy 1:7). “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

⁴ See studies and research mentioned in Fuchs, Matt. “How to Get Healthier Dopamine Highs,” *TIME*, March 7, 2022, <https://time.com/6155109/healthier-dopamine-highs/>.

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<p>Sexual gratification</p>	<p>❖ I can get “harmless” sexual gratification by viewing sexual images, reading about sexual activities, or engaging in sexual behavior online.</p> <p>→ <i>selfishness; using/addiction to pornography; unhealthy sexual behaviors and expectations</i>⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Porn is not harmless to myself or others. People, including human AI, are made in God’s image and not objects to be used for my personal pleasure. There is a cost to my soul; my neighbor; my church; my family; my future sexual partner. I sin through idolatry, adultery, deceit, theft, and greed.⁶ ● Porn will not satisfy. Like a leaky cistern (Jeremiah 2:12-13), porn leaves a vacuum that drives me to escalate to more to get the same fix. Instead, God offers the greater joy of being satisfied in Christ (John 4:15), like a pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44-46). ● I am not beyond hope. “There is no sin stronger than the blood of Jesus.”⁷ I can exert “grace-driven effort” to bring this into the light of the full-strength gospel,⁸ desire wholistic holiness, and seek accountability with others in the church body, knowing “this is the will of God” and that he has called me to holiness, not sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). ● I can be self-aware of my thought life and fight for truth: By grace and with help from others, I can “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).^{9*}
<p>Social comparison</p>	<p>❖ I compare others’ best-filtered, exterior life online with my worst-version, interior self</p> <p>→ <i>envy, coveting, discontentment, self-absorption</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I can cultivate gratitude, which helps me focus on all the ways God is generous and lavish with me (cf. Colossians 1’s language of “glorious inheritance,” “riches” in Christ Jesus). ● My story/situation is ordained by a GOOD God who sees me, loves me, and is worthy of my trust. Even though there are things I want and don’t have, or don’t want and have, I can trust He is up to good in my lack (Romans 8:31-39). ● I can be self-aware of my thought life and fight for truth: I can “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). ● I can follow God’s command to love others and ask God to help me serve others well, so my focus isn’t always on myself. “A new command I give you: love one another as I have loved you.” (John 13:34)

⁵ See, e.g., Cotnoir, Phil. “Porn Poisons Everything,” *The Gospel Coalition*, April 19, 2023, <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/pornography-poisons-everything/>. See also Mueller, Walt. “A Parents’ Primer on Internet Pornography,” *Center for Parent/Youth Understanding*, 2023, <https://cpyu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Parents-Primer-on-Internet-Pornography.pdf>; Damour, Lisa. *Untangled*. Ballantine Books, 2016 (describing how pornographic sex distorts teens’ views of sexual behavior).

⁶ Challies, Tim. “8 Sins You Commit Whenever You Look at Porn,” *Challies*, April 25, 2017, <https://www.challies.com/articles/8-sins-you-commit-when-ever-you-look-at-porn/>.

⁷ Challies, Tim. “5 Ways Porn Lies to You,” *Challies*, Feb. 27, 2017, <https://www.challies.com/articles/5-ways-porn-lies-to-you/>.

⁸ Cotnoir, Phil. “Antidote: Five Strategies to Break free of Porn’s Poisonous Grip,” *The Gospel Coalition*, Oct. 17, 2023, <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/antidote-five-strategies-to-break-free-of-porns-poisonous-grip/>.

⁹ *For additional equipping and discipleship resources on biblical sexuality and sexual sin, see Harvest USA, <https://harvestusa.org/>. Accessed Sept. 12, 2024.