

“*Technology With Heart*”

Tell me if this scenario could happen to someone you know, or for that matter, to yourself: You just finished browsing Pinterest after getting the recipe you needed. You put your phone down to set out the ingredients. Your daughter is sitting in her highchair wanting more applesauce. A text comes in. Your pregnant sister-in-law is asking if you like the stroller you use for your kids. You begin to respond, only to receive an incoming call from your husband. He reminds you about the get-together tonight at a coworker’s house. You go to FaceBook to see who else may be going and decide to message a friend to see what she’s wearing. In the meantime, your daughter’s ear-piercing scream for more applesauce finally grabs your attention. You put your phone down to help her, but quickly pick it back up to text a few possible babysitters for tonight...

Does that sound normal?

There’s a term for the constant demand of our phones: we live in a state of “continuous partial attention.” What does that mean? It means we rarely pay full attention to any one task, while neglecting several others. In a society where we, on average, tap, swipe or touch our phones 2,617 times a day, it’s no wonder we cannot part ways.¹

With *pings* tailgating our every move, our stress levels are higher and attention spans shorter, especially in the presence of our kids.

Now sit yourself down at the lunch table in your daughter’s shoes and begin asking for more applesauce. How do you think she feels about mom’s “continuous partial attention” to her? Or better yet, remind yourself how it felt the last time you tried to get your spouse’s attention from his or her phone.

All the technology that we have with these new electronic devices are neither morally good or morally bad. I’m not making a judgment about our wonderful tools. They are morally neutral: they can be used for either good or bad. It’s ironic that the same technology which helps spread the Gospel to huge population groups throughout the world – can make it much easier for evil to thrive. For example, anyone can now have unlimited access to pornography in the privacy of one’s home on any personal device without risking public shame or loss of reputation.

But hear this: Nearly 30% of all data transferred across the Internet is for pornography. In 2017 alone, the most popular pornographic Web site received 28.5 BILLION visits [fighttheew rug.org]. The population of the world is only 7.7 billion. So that’s almost 1,000 visits per second, or 78.1 million per day. This is way beyond what anyone could have foreseen 25 years ago!

You know, baseball bats have been used to play a game and score points, but they’ve also been used to take a life. The point is that anything can be used for good or evil.

Today we want to refocus our minds on a force in our world we have taken for granted. How is technology and the computer force – in all its various forms – being used in your life and in the life of your children?

In order to make this *refocus* possible, we have to agree with a few biblical truths. The first truth: We are made in the image of God. That comes to us from the first two chapters of the Bible. Second: Being made in the image of God, we are made with a purpose.

With these two principles in mind, technology, while amazingly inspiring at times, is not what is central to our lives! Central to our spiritual understanding is that we are made in the image of God and we are given a role within our faith-journey to shape and influence the world and the lives of other people. We are to be shaped by God who is active in our lives, and we, in turn, are to

be a shaping influence on what is important to Him! Remember what Jesus said about us: **“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world!”** (Matthew 5:13) which means that we, as God’s people, bring change on both corruption and darkness!

- We cannot begin to do that if we bow in obedience to technology regarding our time, our relationships, and how we feed our minds and hearts from the world-wide-web.
- You cannot consume corruption a few hours a day with pornography and be salt.
- You cannot doodle away hours of your time to a screen and be light for others in your life.
- You cannot pour out love and grace on the lives of others if you live disconnected from their faces and feelings.
- You cannot engage in important conversation with your spouse or your child without putting down the screens.
- You cannot use anything as a narcotic and still be alert to the people around you.

Jesus said, “Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends!”

Today that would read differently: “Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his phone for his friends!”

The creation story in Genesis reminds us how we were created in relationship, through relationship, and for relationship with God and with other people! And that’s the challenge for us as technology penetrates deeper and deeper into our lives. In fact, we’re now talking about computer technology as an “addictive force.”

The basic definition for addiction is: Obsession with the activity; thinking about the activity when not engaged in the activity; an inability to cut down or stop; irritability or depression when not engaged in the activity; hiding when or how long one is engaged in the activity; choosing the activity over important obligations or commitments; refusal to cut down or stop in the face of negative effects; and using the activity as a way to cope with negative emotions or circumstances.

Do you recognize this description?

You and I are meant to know God, to seek Him, to walk with Him, and be shaped by Him. From our place in Christ, we are to have dominion over the world – and that includes dominion over those mesmerizing *screens!*

If you cannot put your phone down, it owns you. In fact, some of you are slaves to your phone. It has the power to interrupt your conversations, your dinner, your work, prayer and anything else!

I wish I had more time to detail the real threats technology brings to our homes and families. You’ll find more reason for concern in the insert, listed under “Facts & Trends,” as you think about your role as a parent today. [Note: Information included on narcissism, texting, pornography, cyber-bullying, and sexting] I wanted to be sure you had some information for yourself. All I have time for is to briefly name some of the dangers in our relationship with technology, and how our relationship with technology affects our relationships with our family.

The Nielson Report tells us that adults in America now spend 11 hours a day interacting with media, and for those 18-34 years of age, more than half (57%) of this time is not spent with passive media (TV and radio), but interactive digital media.

By the age of seven, many children born in the U.S. or U.K. will have spent one full year of 24-hour days watching screen media.

The average American child, age eight to 18, spends more than seven hours a day looking at video games, computers, cell phones or television.

For older children and adolescents, excessive screen time is linked to increased psychological difficulties, including hyperactivity, emotional and conduct problems, and difficulties with peers. For these reasons, the American Academy of Pediatrics discourages any screen viewing for children less than two years of age.

The relationship we have with our digital devices invades the way you relate with your family, your children! Too much time on your screens directly limits your availability to other areas of your life, including your spiritual, social, and physical activity.

Our first cry at the moment of birth sends a strong signal, "Notice me, pay attention to me, and comfort me!" Each day that follows, we attempt to communicate and connect with others. The digital age offers us a lot of platforms to complete this longing, but does it help us in our relationships?

Our children want and need their parents more than anything else on the planet, especially in those first few years of life. If research shows that our inability to put the phone down is wiring our kids' brains in such harmful ways, we have a huge lesson to learn. Children deserve to know that they are more important than our phones.

We all have this instinctive drive to connect with others, to share our needs and dreams, and receive reassurance that we are not alone. Children who receive face-to-face gazing, tender touch, and consistent emotional responses from their parents will mature with a stronger sense of self-confidence.

I would bet the barn and the farm that your child would jump at the opportunity for you to take part in a game with them: cards, a game-board, a puzzle, bounce or roll a ball, play catch, or read a book. And yet, too often we make Disney on television their babysitter.

READ 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

¹ If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. ³ If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

⁸ Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But ***love*** will last forever!

We are meant to hear and listen, to speak and understand. We have an amazing capacity for empathy, which means we have the ability to identify with or understand the perspective, experiences, or motivations of another individual and to understand another person's emotional state. So *the absence of empathy* may be the biggest sin in our lives because of our preoccupation with these technology toys!

Keep in mind that empathy is a part of our purpose and calling as children of God. We are placed on earth for a little while to learn how to live in love with God and love each other. And this

requires focused attention.

We have a God who became like us. He entered into our world, dressed in our skin. It is *empathy* unlike anything the world has ever known. He became flesh and was *feeling* with us. He felt our joys and sorrows, our grief and evil. He felt our longings for intimacy and love.

It is the love of which the Bible speaks: **Love is patient and kind... It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.**

We cannot let technology consume us so much that we quit *feeling* the love and empathy God wants us to share with the many who are in need around us. These screens of ours are not our masters, so they are not to have dominion over us. May we, like Christ, enter into the lives of others, feeling with our spirit, looking in their faces, and listening to their hearts. And let us teach the next generation to master the things of this world, whatever they may be, and model for them what it means to serve our incarnate, compassionate God who died that we might be slaves only to Him who designed us and loves us.²

As people of faith, we need to learn how to be still and how to be silent, in essence, to unplug. Luke 5:16 tells us that, “Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.” If Christ, being fully human and fully God, felt the need to disconnect on a regular basis, then how much more do we need to do the same? God encourages us with the words of the psalmist, “Be still, and know that I am God ... “ (Psalm 46:10) which makes you wonder – if you can really know that God is Lord in your life if you are not still.

Eric Scalise asks a probing question: “If God stopped talking to me, how long would it take before I noticed?”³

[SEE the *Sermon Companion* at the end of this message for extra help.]

INVITATION: You may be taking part in some habit with your on-line devices and don’t know how to give it up or get away; to be set free from that which consumes or haunts you! God may be speaking to you today about the danger of these screen tools and how you’ve allowed these constant distractions to shape you into a more self-centered person ...and you’re seeing how you ignored God’s greater call to surrender your heart to have a heart like His!

This is a call to repent, to change the way you think and act through a prayer of confession.

Sermon Companion

With All the Great Uses We Find with Computer Technology, There Is a Handful of Threats and Dangers for Which We Should Be Aware:

Increased Narcissism – A personality disorder defined by an exaggerated sense of self-importance and the need for admiration.

Studies show in the last 30 years there has been a 30% increase in teenage narcissism. More kids today think they are better than everyone else. Many struggle with narcissism because they are constantly faced with social media, reality TV, and technology that communicates that they are stars and entitled to do and say whatever they want. “Children nine to 11 now hold ‘fame’ as their #1 value. Fame ranked 15th in 1997,” reports the *Journal of Psychology Research on Cyberspace*.

It is extremely important for youth workers to address this problem by showing teens how

to have empathy for others. Teenagers need to hear more adults talk about kindness, manners, integrity, humility, commitment, and thankfulness.

Texting while driving – According to the National Safety Council, 390,000 injuries occur each year from accidents that involve texting while driving (25% of all traffic-related injuries) which includes nine fatalities every day.

Pornography – Three major pornography Web sites are now more popular than Netflix, Instagram, and Twitter. According to Web site rankings, the porn sites were only outdone by five other outlets: Google, Facebook, YouTube, Amazon, and Yahoo. Every second, nearly 30,000 U.S. Internet users access and consume pornography. Last year, 40 million Americans regularly visited porn sites, and some 200,000 Americans described themselves as “porn addicts.” 35% of all Internet downloads are related to pornography. – *FaithWire* 1/10/19

Cyber-Bullying – Taunting, teasing and harassing used to have its stopping point once a child got home from school. Nowadays, bullies use social media, Facebook, Instagram, group texting and a whole lot more to interrupt your family dinners that can break our children emotionally! Think *humiliation* in front of their whole peer group, their school!

Teenagers check their phones first thing in the morning and the last thing at night. A full 45% of American teenagers say they are online “almost constantly.” And we can’t just put down our phones! We have to remember that their entire lives are now tied to these cell phones. If there’s an activity going on at a youth group in church, that’s how they notify the kids. They don’t call them anymore or send e-mails... they’re in a Facebook group. This is their community and they’d be lost without it!

Sexting – Sexting is defined as “the sending or forwarding of sexually explicit photographs or videos of the sender.”

Parents should sit down with their children before they have their first smartphone or opportunity to access the Internet and discuss the rules around smartphone use, establishing good boundaries that are consistently enforced.

If parents think, “My child would never do that!” consider a 2013 study of high school students that found nearly 20% of participants reported they had sent a sexually explicit image of themselves through a cell phone, and more than 25% reported forwarding an image. 40% of those surveyed reported receiving a sexually explicit image. That was 6 years ago. And the smartphone use has only grown since then.

Pastor Kevin adds: I suggest that parents snoop into their children’s phones to observe and monitor the kind of activity going on there. Some of you may think that is a gross violation of a child’s right to privacy – but I’m not sure your children have a right to privacy. They’re children; they are minors. You’re in charge of their safety. You have to know the dangers that will confront them. You have to be the decision maker in your home! I want to monitor my kids.

Facts & Trends

Teens who report high-frequency digital media use are twice as likely to develop attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

– study published in July 17, 2018 *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA)

Eight years ago only 35% of Americans owned a smartphone, but that number has already more than doubled to 77% according to Pew Research ...and among 18-29 year olds, an astounding

94% have a smartphone.

Although technology has improved our lives in profound ways, it has also presented a growing number of unique challenges. Increasing dependence on handheld devices, tablets, and computers is impacting our brains, cognitive function, relationships, and overall mental health. Daniel Amen

In an iPass study involving 1,700 people from North America and Europe, researchers found that 40% of participants considered Wi-Fi their first priority for luxury or necessity, followed by sex at 37%, chocolate at 14% and alcohol at 9%. – Daniel Amen

A full 45% of American teens say that they are online “almost constantly,” a 2018 Pew Research study shows.

It is now possible to have cell phones, computers, televisions, and portable electronic devices within our gaze during all of our waking hours. The results are staggering for children!

- By the age of seven, many children born in the U.S. or U.K. will have spent one full year of 24-hour days watching screen media.
- The average American child aged eight to 18 spends more than seven hours per day looking at video games, computers, cell phones or television (includes multi-tasking time).
- Television viewing time for children under age three is linked to delayed language acquisition.
- For older children and adolescents, excessive screen time is linked to increased psychological difficulties, including hyperactivity, emotional and conduct problems, and difficulties with peers.

In a recent study conducted by George, et al. (2017), the impact of technology was examined with 151 adolescent subjects who were already assessed as being at risk for mental health problems. Results from the researchers showed that the time spent using digital technologies coupled with the number of text messages being sent to peers were directly correlated with an increase of same-day symptoms associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Conduct Disorder.

More recent research has shown that excessive screen time results in childhood obesity, social-relational difficulties, and disturbed sleep patterns. Other studies suggest that too much screen time is inhibiting children from learning to read facial and other non-verbal cues, as well as recognize emotions.

Students are now more distracted than ever. In a typical classroom, students are checking their digital devices an average of 11.43 times during class for "non-classroom activities." The Journal of Media Education published a study that found typical students spend a fifth of their time in class doing digital things that are unrelated to their school work.

– Dian Schaffhouser

Why do teens have a constant need to monitor *everything*? In order to keep up! With trends and gossip among peers, there is little that is worse than not keeping up and knowing “what’s going on.” They monitor in order not to be left behind.

35% of all Internet downloads are related to pornography.

– FaithWire 1/10/19

In 2017, Children’s Mercy Hospital saw 444 children who had been sexually abused within the past week, putting them in the top 5% of U.S. hospitals treating sexual assault victims. When including children who report abuse after five days, the number rises to nearly 1,000 per year with the majority of victims being girls between four and eight-years-old. This sort of sexual assault is “a learned behavior” and nurses are finding more and more that pornography is playing a role in these cases. Many young perpetrators admit they are acting out what they have seen in pornography.

– *LifeSite*, 12/10/18

Nearly 30% of all data transferred across the Internet is for pornography, and porn sites attract an enormous number of hits. In 2017 alone, a popular pornographic Web site received 28.5 BILLION visits [fightthenewdrug.org]. That’s almost 1,000 visits per second, or 78.1 million per day.

Some estimates state that teenagers average as many as nine hours per day on screens; including video games, social media, and television – sometimes accessing multiple personal devices simultaneously.

Consistent use of pornography promotes the perception that women are only objects and sex is unrelated to love, commitment, and marriage.

Use of pornography can create unrealistic expectations from a spouse.

It’s not uncommon for many people to have their first exposure to pornography during their Middle School years. The average age for first-time viewers is age 11.

Sexual sin always progresses, drawing people farther and farther from God. What may start as an “innocent” flirtation with sin can lead to deadly consequences.

What I’m able to do about it!

As a parent, here are some things to put into practice:

1. Take a tech timeout. Establish a time when all devices will be turned off for the remainder of the evening. Not only will this provide a break from texting, browsing the Internet, and posting content on social media, it will also afford you the opportunity to spend more quality time with friends and family.
2. Schedule weekly Internet fasts. A great way to curb the adverse effects of digital obsession is to reserve one day of the week (for maximum effect, choose a day you have off from work) for an Internet fast. Rather than sitting around staring at a screen all day, spend some time working on a hobby, engaging in physical activity, or enjoying the beauty of the great outdoors.
3. Create a technology-free bedroom. One of the best ways to avoid the dangers of digital dependence is to remove TVs, computers, and other electronic devices from your bedroom. Creating a relaxing, distraction-free environment may facilitate better sleep and increase intimacy with your partner.
4. Follow the “one screen at a time” rule. To prevent your attention from being divided by multiple devices, use only one screen at a time. This should aid your ability to focus, while also giving your overstimulated brain some much needed downtime.

5. Use your brain, not your computer. Our reliance on our brains to remember facts and problem solve has significantly diminished due to the "Google Effect." Before you reach for your phone or ask Siri, try to recall information using your brain.

6. Never talk and text. Keep phone and text conversations to a minimum when you are with other people. Even better, put your phone out of sight.

7. Protect your pleasure centers. Connect meaningful activities and pleasure, such as volunteering for events you love. Seek pleasure in the little things in your life, such as a walk with a friend, holding hands with your spouse, a great meal or a meaningful church service.

8. Boost dopamine naturally. Eat foods that contain dopamine-boosting properties, such as chicken, turkey, seafood, almonds, pumpkin and sesame seeds, turmeric, oregano, vegetables (for folate and magnesium), olive oil, and green tea.

Family Values – Whenever one speaker addresses marriage and family issues, he challenges listeners to turn off their screens at home and do "Face-to-Face TV" instead. These are ways we can communicate, connect deeply, and build intimacy with loved ones.

– W. Jesse Gill

9. Face-to-Face – Gaze upon the faces of your loved ones at least 20 minutes a day

10. Touch – Show affection and tender touch to your children and spouse.

11. Vulnerable – Share your needs with one another and invite loved ones to do the same.

Gaming – For parents to consider in this brave new world of gaming technology:

– by Gregory Jantz

12. Keep in mind that just because gaming didn't hurt you as a child (as far as you can perceive) doesn't mean that the new situations, the new games, the age of your child – will not be affected as well.

13. Decide ahead of time what types of games you will allow, not only at home, but also with your child's friends.

14. Set limits on the amount of time for gaming.

15. Allow gaming only in "public" areas of the house, and in the proximity to others.

1. www.businessinsider.com/dscout-research-people-touch-cell-phones-2617-times-a-day-1016-7

2. *God or Technology: Who is Our Master?* by Diane Langberg; pg. 56-57 in "Christian Counseling Today"; Vol. 23, No. 2

3. *Unplugged or Undone? Technology, Mental Health, and Wellness*; by Eric Scalise; pg. 46-48 in "Christian Counseling Today"; Vol. 23, No. 2