

Engaging wisely with Smartphones and Technology

When it comes to this topic firstly, I want to say - it's vast!

I spent a lot of time cutting my script and I haven't even touched much on some topics like A.I. – which is another seminar entirely.

Maybe questions at the end will help to answer or clarify some things.

The second is that I haven't mastered this at all.

And as I did the research on this – I was so convicted on my lack of discipline and self-control with my phone.

So, with that being said – let's dive in.

As we think about the first question **on the handout:**

1. How should we view all technology?

Is it a blessing?

Or is it a burden?

Technology can be such a gift.

You think of the fact that you can Videocall anyone in the world.

You can find an address and get directions almost immediately.

Or ask A.I. for an answer and immediately get a detailed response.

But there's also times, when – I don't know about you – but I just want to chuck my phone out the window!

The constant buzz, the check and check again of my phone.

Endless distraction and the worry of not having it.

Sometimes I'd love to be a digital monk and retreat to the days before the internet – remember those!

Maybe some don't!

And when it comes to technology Melvin Cransberg argued that:

“Technology is neither good, nor bad nor neutral”.

He says its really a question of Stewardship.

A question of **HOW** we use all technology like our phones.

As we view our phones and technology in light of the **truth that:**

Jesus is Lord – to the glory of God the Father.

He is Lord so we're called to steward everything he's given us under his sovereign care.

And I'll be honest that was my only view on this until recently.

But actually, as we'll see tonight it's not only about stewardship under Christ's Lordship.

Because it's also being aware that all tech has a built-in bias.

It's doing something to us!

Samuel James in his book – **Digital Liturgies** - argues that **[technology is] not simply a tool to deliver some desired good but a means of reshaping society"**. P34.

Every piece of technology is changing us.

The question is how?

How is it changing us?

As **secondly, we ask:**

2. How is technology changing us?

Some would say that technology just allows us to do the same things but better and faster.

From email to the Amazon man – life just happens faster!

But both Tony Reinke and Carl Trueman acknowledge that it doesn't just do that but that:

Technology fundamentally changes our relationship to the world.

And many of you know that to be true.

Whether it's working from home, doing our shopping online – or paying with contactless– tech is changing us and how we interact.

One of the most significant changes in recent history has been **the invention** of:

1. The car.

Once people were born, lived, worked and died in the same place now we have a freedom of movement unlike ever before.

Now we're forever mobile.

We can go to a workplace, school or church anywhere we want.

With increased technology it's brought about the power of individual choice.

Community has less influence, and the individual has far more power.

And we see that in 4 other examples as well as secondly

2. Music

Historically music had to live and played in a gathering like, church, weddings, funeral or dances and celebrations.

But now music is symbolised in this: **iTunes**.

It's not our tunes – it's my tunes on iTunes. My playlists.

My podcasts and my shows.

How we consume music shapes us.

As we've moved from something shared to something Lazer focused on the individual.

As music is tailored to individuals whenever they choose to listen to it.

3. Medicine

Medicine can be used to do great good or great harm.

I don't know if you saw the recent episode where a womb was taken out of a **pregnant** woman so cancerous tissue could be removed and then it placed back inside her!

WOW!!

Or that they've found the DNA necessary to develop a cure **for HIV**. Or the weight loss jabs! YESS!!

Totally amazing!

And yet when medicine is practiced without acknowledging Christ's Lordship – it's a disaster.

As the mantra of:

"My body my choice comes in".

And we've seen that recently in the updated laws in **abortion** allowing women to abort – almost to the point of delivery - simply by buying pills online!

The heart of man is truly wicked.

Or the assisted **dying** legislation – which if passed by the Lords will mean that – people can now legally kill themselves if they feel like they're a burden on others.

As the power of technology without Christ leads to death.

We see that too fourthly in the:

4. Trans & sexual revolution

If it's my body my choice - then I can do what I want with it!

Because of the advancement in technology - there's no longer any limits!

Anything is possible.

Our bodies are just raw material to do with whatever we want.

Technology supercharges the desires of the human heart.

And that's an issue because as Jesus says, that's where the problem lies.

As he says that:

Mark 7:21-22

For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

The problem is that in a world without Christ, technology will often be used for our own selfish and sinful desires.

Therefore, perversion and **sexual sin** will become the norm!

So porn is everywhere!

As porn stars become modern day influencers!

Even people who rise to the height of fame – **like Strictly** Come dancing stars – even they - realise that that is anthrax for their souls.

And the real temptation for boys, men and even some women – Christian and non – is to become addicted to this!

To think there's no harm in it...

Boys and girls, men and women are all being catechised in a pornified culture so that filthy images, language and immoral expectations of one another just become the norm.

As people fall into a pit of shame and just feel trapped.

And yet in Christ, in God's mercy he cleanses us by his amazing grace as the **apostle Paul** says:

1 Corinthians 6:11

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Because Jesus is Lord and he has made me new.

I live for him now

Because tech is powerful and the most powerful piece that most of us own **is this** - the smartphone.

And that's what we're going to think about now – as we **ask the question**:

3. How are smartphones and social media changing us?

One of the first areas of concern for many is this:

1. Depression & Anxiety

And you know depending on your age will depend how significant it's been.

This graph from the US shows how things have changed depending on your generation.

Interestingly Generation X and baby boomers have very little difference.

But millennial and especially Gen Z are noted to be far more anxious.

And you know that anecdotally as well – at home and at work - as smartphones and social media have had different impacts on different ages.

One key period of time of change for many young people was – according to Jonathan Haidt in his book, the anxious generation from **2010-2015**.

This is a period that he describes as the “great rewiring”.

He argues that the iPhone was released in 2007, but widespread social media usage didn't occur until 2010 and became widespread in 2012.

So, you see between 2010 and 2015 is as he describes it **“the great rewiring of a generation”**.

And you see that in this graph - in the numbers of girls and boys becoming ever more depressed and the numbers of girls and boys turning to self-harm.

But perhaps you think it's just extreme in the US... **well stats** from the UK say that self-harm has risen by 78% for girls and 134% for boys.

Again 2012 is a key year for social media uptake.

Girls are more drawn to apps like Instagram and snapchat as they compare themselves to others – leading to depression and anxiety skyrocketing.

Boys on the other hand will be drawn to text-based apps, online gaming and online porn. Some of which is absolutely abhorrent.

Haidt suggests that because of the massive influence of smartphones and social media it has resulted in:

- Young people less able and less willing to socially interact – preferring online instead.
- They are more easily discouraged and will tend to quit sooner when things get hard or negative feedback comes.
- And they'll be more sleep deprived as they're either on their phones just as they say "**doom scrolling**" at night and in the morning.

As a result of this research Haidt has drawn the **conclusion that:**

"Social media is a cause of anxiety, depression and other ailments, not just a correlate".

In other words, it doesn't just make it worse – it is the source.

But because of this feeling of doom and dread – so many young people – especially young men are turning to God!

We see that in **the recent Quiet Revival** report. These stats on depression and anxiety are from a few years ago and so now many young people are seeking hope meaning and purpose in God not in this world!

Praise God for that!

And yet at the same time, it doesn't do away with the issue of smart phones and social media entirely.

As they are causing anxiety and depression and secondly there's the issue of:

2. Addiction

With the development of A.I., social media is getting better and better at keeping us hooked.

Patrick Miller describes short form videos like Tick Tock and the rest like gambling **slot machines**.

It's not just that we're enjoying the video it's the excitement of what's next and so swipe, swipe and swipe again.

It's designed to keep us hooked because our attention is their cash. It's designed to addict us – which is why I say this is the bias that's built into social media.

It's supercharged to keep us hooked.

3. **Distraction**

It is that we're always present but often never fully there.

And so, it leads us to a superficiality in everything.

It's like an old laptop running too many programs!

The fan is whirring away with too much going on.

Some of us are impacted more than others – but if we have a smartphone - none of us are untouched by it.

As one MIT professor says because of phones and social media **“we are forever elsewhere”**.

And that is a problem. And again, it's a problem with what it's designed to do.

To distract us from what we're supposed to be doing.

4. **Individualism**

The other way smartphones and social media are shaping us is that it's making the individual as Lord over all things.

There is now a drift away from external sources of authority and towards the self as authority.

People are suspicious of formal authority and would much rather do their own thing.

Without Jesus you might hear the phrases:

“You be you. Be true to yourself. Follow your heart. Or find yourself”.

But this kind of thinking is completely anti-gospel.

And we have to reject it.

Because our real identity is part of God's people – not as solo people.

As Paul says:

1 Corinthians 3:16

¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

Or let me shock you with the words of **Cyprian of Carthage**, an early church father and echoed by **the protestant** reformer John Calvin who both said that:

“You cannot have God as your Father unless you have the church for your Mother.”

According to the New Testament – to be a Christian is to belong to Christ's church.

That's who we are – who we really are – we are part of Christ's body.

5. T.M.I. – what is TMI? Too much information.

Reflecting on Neil Postman's book entitled “Amusing ourselves to death, Brett McCracken **in his book Scrolling** ourselves to death says that the issue is one of information glut!

It's a problem of information overload!

As he says.... **(QUOTE p168) (250 words)**

As rage leads to clicks as people are becoming polarised, pushed to more extreme positions!

To be honest with you as a pastor – please pray for your pastors here because this is one of the greatest challenges to church unity.

That everyone is being more extreme and far less tolerant in how we hold our views.

Glenn Scrivener in his podcast talks about this in one of his videos that I've cited in the resources.

The issue is that we're all siloed into thinking that side isn't just wrong it's wicked!

As you see language online saying that:

- People don't just win an argument – they destroy someone!

- It's not an economic decline – it's a cost-of-living and economic crisis!
- The weather's not just changing – but it's a sign of the global climate emergency.
- And politicians – they're not just making poor decisions, they can be classed as evil, Nazis, Fascists, dictators or lunatics.

Because media and social media companies know what they're doing!

Clear, balanced, honest, impartial information doesn't get clicks – but things which illicit fear and rage do!

So be self-aware.

Take time to reflect on what you're watching and listening to and remember what is true in life and don't be swept up in it all.

As we say along with the **psalmist**:

Psalm 42:11- Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God.

Because whatever happens in our lives – Jesus reigns – and he has saved us from chaos to be renewed in our minds.

As we build good godly and **wise habits**.

And that's what I'd love us to consider now as we think about:

Twelve wise habits

1. Sacred spaces

One big change we could make is to not have any screens in bedrooms but to buy **an alarm clock**.

This is something I've done, and it makes a difference – my phone isn't the last and first thing I look at!

Added to that, not having any screens at the table is a healthy habit.

It's not law but wisdom as we are truly present with one another.

2. Clear boundaries

I'm going to shock you with this one but - one broad recommendation by Haidt and many others is not to give a young person a **smart phone** before the age of 16 and no social media before 18.

It might sound radical, but I think given the evidence you can see why.

I've got an 18-month old daughter and my wife and I are always talking about it. People might just say well what's the harm?

But as you look at the evidence you can see it. Screens and social media are harmful to young people and to us as adults.

Happy to take questions on that at the end though...

Trying to get phones out of schools entirely is also one big step that we would encourage our school leaders to take.

3. Space & silence

One habit recommended by Haidt is to unplug.

Even to let yourself and your children **get bored!**

Smartphones and tablets provide entertainment without limits so there's no down time.

And so, one thing is not to listen to things or be connected to something all the time.

To have space and silence – without any tech - to think, pray and reflect is really good for us.

4. Be ruthless with your phone!

It really does start with us.

We have to give ourselves the chance to use our screens well.

Maybe it's ensuring we have **cut off times** at home.

Or special places where we place our phones and screens.

Because there's always the temptation to scroll. To check. to tap.

Or worse still in low moments to compare ourselves to others or turn to porn for comfort.

So let me say whatever you know you need to do with your phone – do it.

Put guards in place for your own heart and soul.

5. Appreciate our lack of understanding

There's so much information out there and so little time to process it.

The problem with **social media** is that from a couple of short videos (without context) and a few emotive headlines we think we have the full picture.

But often we don't have a clue what's really going on!

Whether it's the war in the middle east, or politics at home – we must hold our views with humility.

And for the sake of unity within the body of Christ.

Because as believers we're called to think differently as Paul tells us:

Colossians 3:12 – Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

That is radical in what is a rage filled world.

6. Modern day Catechism

Our phones are forming us albeit badly in what is a form of catechism – of spiritual formation.

And so in that light here is a resource which I'm currently going through with a group of guys.

It's called - **The Gospel Way Catechism': A Tool for Spiritual Formation in a Secular Age.**

It connects what the bible teaches with what the world thinks. As we think not just of verses but of seeing life in light of a biblical worldview.

7. Read Church history

Smartphones and social media are always thinking about the new and the immediate thing. But we have a faith grounded in history.

And in fact many young people today are turning to Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches because of the idea that it's a faith that's never changed – in a world that's forever changing.

And yet that's not the truth as they have brought in manmade traditions and held them to the same level of authority as Scripture.

But Scripture is our final authority as that's where God speaks!

And recently there was the anniversary of the **Nicene Creed – 1700** years since it was written.

We have a faith that goes all the way back to the Apostles and it's so important to consider that.

Our methods may have changed but the message has not.

8. Remember the Sabbath

Practicing rest on your phone could be something to explore.

Maybe that's 1 or 2 weeks a year, a day a week and an hour a day.

Really enjoy the gift that is Sunday and use it as an opportunity to host people for lunch or spend time with other believers.

To enjoy God together.

9. Formation as a body

We want Sunday to be the best day of the week!

As Samuel James says **Pixels are not made in God's image people are.**

Because a huge part of spiritual formation is simply to join together **as a people**, singing, praying, eating together and being formed by God's word together.

To delight in the truth that we're part of Christ's body together.

As we hear the voice of Christ in the preaching of his word as we gather to worship together in person.

Online is really a cheap version of the real thing.

10. Share life in person

With the advancement of tech – it's much easier to just connect with people online.

But when it comes to us as believers – we really want to grab any chance we can to meet with **people in person**.

Whether it's church or social connections we should prioritise meeting in person.

Workplaces are asking more and more people to return to the office for good reasons.

Because to be present in person is far more powerful than being present virtually.

11. Take more risks

Haidt suggest that because of media stories, many parents have been overly protective in the real world and yet at the same time under protective online.

He says we should reverse that!

To **take risks**.

That we parent in light of God's sovereign care of us and we also live our lives as adults not in fear but in faith.

As we raise children, we want to give them opportunities to make mistakes and grow to be independent.

And we want to do the same as adults – to live knowing that God cares for us so we can do far more adventurous things – especially for Jesus – to consider overseas mission abroad or local outreach to others.

12. Keep an eternal perspective

There's so many social media influencers giving us health hacks to try to live forever.

Some as so scared of death they're too afraid to really live.

Social media and all the influencers make us think that now – that right now - is the most important thing!

But that's not true, is it? – as we fix our eyes on eternity.

As Paul says in **Colossians 3v1-2**

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

So that's the 12 habits which hopefully you find some of them useful.

And that leads me to my final reflection:

5. Gaze at Christ

Smartphones and social media tell us one story but God tells us another.

As God made us for an eternal relationship of love with him.

However, we thought we knew better.

So, we chose to eat the forbidden fruit – we **unfollowed** God and he **blocked us** from being in his presence.

Called to enjoy his presence, peace and love we were cast out into the chaos and confusion of the world.

Now rage, fear and anxiety reign in our hearts – where once there was peace.

Instead of turning to worship God we turn inwards and worship ourselves.

Without God we are without peace, without hope and forever distracting ourselves to death.

But wonderfully Jesus Saves us from it!

As Paul says in Titus 2

when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. Titus 2v4-5

Jesus saved us from sin through the technology of a Roman cross!

As he was crucified for our sakes!

Such is God's love for us!

This is the good news – that we know and proclaim to everyone.

That Jesus saves us from our sins and ourselves.

So we need no longer look down and in to our devices.

But instead, look outward to others and upward to God.

As Hebrews says – let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.

As we dwell in his word and speak to him in prayer.

As the **Scottish pastor Robert Murray McCheyne** once said:

“For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ.”

Or we could say for every 1 look at your phone - take 10 looks at Christ!

Let Christ reign in our hearts !

As the song by Sovereign Grace says:

**Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.**

As we set new habits in our lives that bring glory to God, blessing to us, and to our families.

Pointing us not downwards to our phones but upwards to our precious saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

- Discuss Resources

- Q&A

- Prayer

Resources

YouTube

- #TIKTOKBOOM? | Keynote with Glynn Harrison (Part 1 of 3)
<https://youtu.be/m-ZuKXY49so?si=EpYA8Hkzs9a3-ivJ>
- Smartphone Addiction and Gen Alpha | Jonathan Haidt, Social Psychologist
<https://youtu.be/k1SyCZwMqfY?si=bdYTfZUMIWAqsbh0>
- Helping parents to talk to teens on social media, the internet and porn | Marshall Ballantine-Jones, The Pastor's Heart
<https://youtu.be/kt2RnYwjzQ0?si=C51AHZ6r8pv9ASHy>
- Understanding Adolescent Anxiety, Depression, and Mental Health | TGC Podcast - Ep. 359
<https://youtu.be/Gk5dQyEpuRg?si=bpbmvZmRR0yW2TC2>
- 6 Lies We're Being Fed Right Now | Glen Scrivener (Speak Life)
<https://youtu.be/SGKknrUiyfU?si=ALqwSnh4fJ3tzYWWY>

Books

- Raising Kids in a Screen-Saturated World, Help for Parents | Eliza Huie
<https://uk.10ofthose.com/product/9781912373314/raising-kids-in-a-screen-saturated-world-paperback>
- Scrolling Ourselves to Death, Reclaiming Life in a Digital Age | Brett McCracken and Ivan Mesa
https://uk.10ofthose.com/product/9781433599446/scrolling-ourselves-to-death-paperback?srsId=AfmBOoqlDXp_IVjUIRhuSC1C30TfqdHUp8FfBi_InNqk699JZX-4zvLF
- The Anxious Generation | Jonathan Haidt
<https://www.waterstones.com/book/the-anxious-generation/jonathan-haidt/9781802063271>
- The Gospel Way Catechism: 50 Truths That Take On the World | Trevin West and Thomas West
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Gospel-Way-Catechism-Truths-World/dp/0736991417>

Podcasts

- The Crossway Podcast - How to Develop Healthier Tech Habits in 2025 | Samuel James
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2cC8j6agaJhDHbzsdwZz0J>
- The Crossway Podcast - How to Talk with Your Kids about Sexuality, Screen Time, and Hostility at School | Andrew and Christian Walker
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/14Hkos9nq6UvllT3TlyHY3>
- The Crossway Podcast - What Your Teenager Needs Most | Paul Tripp
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1t68j2IEAA9984kRNAk5Zv>
- Redeeming Productivity - What is Christian Productivity? | Reagan Rose
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/3RQRXMmiZTGJhqMlGetDeG>

Articles

- Gen Z, Fight 'Brain Rot' by Reading Books February 3, 2025 | by Luke Simon
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gen-z-brain-rot-books/>
- Guard Kids' Eyes and Hearts Online, November 7, 2024 | Tim Wolford
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/guard-kids-online/>
- Seek Wisdom in the Age of Algorithms, October 13, 2022 | Steve Bateman
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/wisdom-algorithms/>