

**Session #4: Discerning Technology – Wisdom in a Tech Immersive World**

*Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight,  
for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching*

Proverbs 4:1-2

**Introduction: Tell me how old you are without telling me how old you are:**

- You used a rotary phone as your primary house phone (land line, what is that?!), used a payphone, and had an answering machine; there were things like “collect calls” and the thought of seeing someone on the other end was the stuff of science fiction.
- The cool kids got an independent phone line in their own room, and the really cool kids got a pager that could receive the same type of messages that a calculator would
- You remember watching television in black and white, getting up to change the channel (Saturday morning cartoons) and only having a few channels
- You remember your first computer which could do word documents and solitaire
- Dial up internet – waiting for a connection, AOL, and SLOWWWWWW
- My first year of college I needed to use a computer lab to write papers, a room with 40 bulky screens and only a few students had their own computer

Now I understand that some in this room go back before my time and others view this list like we’re old fogies, but what is abundantly clear is that **technology**, *which has always existed and been used by mankind to subdue his environment*, has been on an exponential rise in the last decade +. It took roughly **3 decades** from the invention of the computer to move it into most households. It took **2 decades** from the invention of the television to see it in most households. But with the inception of the *iphone* in 2007, it has taken mere years to infiltrate not only households but individuals; *to date, there are 7.2 billion smartphones in the world, with a population of 8 billion people total* (some probably have more than one). 99% of Americans from 18-64 own cell phones, with over 95% of that population owning a smart phone. The age of individuals continues to go down as more and more children not only have access to a screen but to the internet (current average age is 11.6, but that number continues to go down!). This is not going away, is not a mere trend, and must be considered by parents, Christians, pastors, teachers, disciples, and those who care about people at all.

**A few important disclaimers:**

- **Technology is a tool that when used wisely and humbly, can be of great benefit –**

Think about the benefit of having access to information and communication instantly:

Connect with people around the world, instantly – in missions, it used to take months to get letters delivered by slow boat

Globalized knowledge and understanding cultures

Helpful to families separated geographically

Store, save, secure, and access data far more quickly and efficiently  
Gives access to knowledge to the masses rather than those who were close to it

- **We want aim for WISDOM, not the poles in this discussion –**

Sometimes the easiest thing in any new or complex issue is to stay on the poles and function in black and white lines. With technology its easier to say: **Throw it all out** (impossible) or **Use it all** (unprofitable). I've talked with several parents who did not let their kids have ANY device or access to tech, and when they left the house they explored and exploded since they had no training in wisdom. But most who have experienced **problems are a result of having no guidelines, rails, or discussion**. In the last year we've seen a parent who could not get their pre-schooler out of the car and off their device, and this week I was texted by a friend who's teen daughter melted down when the threat of taking her device lead to volcanic eruption, and giving in by the parent. **Wisdom is the word, and wisdom is what a parent teaches.**

- **This affects all of us, and none of us have handled the proliferation of technology perfectly –**

Since the rise of technology, internet, and devices has been meteoric, we have all made mistakes in parenting and personal life that we wish we could go back and change (if you don't think you have, you will at the end of this). This morning is not about **shaming or guilt, but about learning, growing, discerning, and repenting if need be.**

In 2017, Tony Reike wrote a book to adults called "12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You" (one I still recommend), where he began to observe issues related to smartphone usage among adults, calling out the fact that people, **believers and unbelievers alike, were:** 1) addicted to distraction, 2) Ignoring flesh and blood, 3) craving immediate approval, 4) losing literacy (know a little about a lot, but not enough about the important); 5) Feeding on what was produced; 6) Becoming what we "like" ; 7) Growing in loneliness; 8) Get comfortable with secret/hidden vices, 9) Losing meaning; 10) Fear missing out (now fear being left out), 11) Becoming harsh with one another; 12) Lose our place in time.

He wisely said this about our Smartphones: *"Too often what my phone exposes in me is NOT the holy desires of what I know I should want, not even what I think I want, and especially not what I want YOU to think I want. My phone screen divulges the razor sharp pixels of **what my heart really wants!**"*

*"Whatever happens on my smartphone, especially under the guise of anonymity, is the **true expose of my heart, reflected in full color pixels back to my eyes.**"*

Five years later, he wrote **"God, Technology, and the Christian Life"** (also recommended), where he said *"Our technology can amplify our powers but they cannot give us **wisdom with those powers**. If we have technology but **not wisdom**, we will use the best communications ever invented to **broadcast stupidity**"* (p. 223)

What we need is a great helping of wisdom to navigate these waters, and parents must impart this kind of wisdom to their children, which means WE MUST GROW IN WIDSOM:

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you,  
<sup>2</sup>making your ear attentive **to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;**  
<sup>3</sup>yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,

<sup>4</sup>if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,  
<sup>5</sup>**then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.**  
<sup>6</sup>For **the LORD gives wisdom** from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;  
<sup>7</sup>he stores up **sound wisdom** for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,  
<sup>8</sup>guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints.  
<sup>9</sup>Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path;  
<sup>10</sup>**for wisdom will come into your heart,** and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;  
<sup>11</sup>discretion will watch over you, **understanding will guard you,**  
<sup>12</sup>**delivering you** from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech,  
<sup>13</sup>who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness,  
<sup>14</sup>who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil,  
<sup>15</sup>men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways.

### Proverbs 2:1-15

#### The Caution & Needed Discernment with Technology and Parenting:

One of the books I would highly recommend is written by a secular author named Jonathan Haidt, who also wrote a book named *“The Coddling of the American Mind”* another strong recommendation. But his book called *“The Anxious Generation: how the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness”* where he goes into research done since 2010 and how the proliferation of technology and particularly smartphones has affected our children. Most of the following points come from this book:

**Technology today is not a neutral playing field, as** designers and engineers have written algorithms tailored to keep people online as long as possible. In other words, when you are scrolling “Reels” or waiting for your social media to refresh, each part of that is designed to keep you in front of the screen.

The central claim of the book is a good one: ***well-meaning and well intentioned parents have chosen OVERPROTECTION for our kids in the real world and UNDERPROTECTION in the virtual world – major reasons why children born after 1995 have become known as the anxious generation.***

“Overall children have spent far less time playing with, talking to, touching, and making eye contact with their friends and family, thereby reducing their participation in embodied social behaviors that are essential for successful human behaviors....well-intentioned but disastrous shifts toward over-protection and restricting autonomy in the real world (like *resolving conflict, dealing with bullies, sharing, losing, winning, dealing with fear. Etc.*), and have moved from *play based childhood to phone based childhood and parenting.*

Parents have tried to eliminate risk in the real world but have given full access and independence in the evil playground of the virtual.

#### A few important stats:

Since 2010 (with the proliferation of smartphones) teenage girls with **major depression** has risen 145% with boys number lower overall but percentage has risen by 161%

Anxiety is up from 2010-2020 in every age group, except in those over 50 (where smartphone usage is the lowest)

On college campuses, higher mental illness and diagnosis has come as a result of this anxiety and depression

ER visits from self harm among girls – up **188%, 48% for boys**

Suicide – up 91% in boys, 167% in girls

Now that smartphone usage has risen, there is research and observation on the consequences:

- 1) **Social Deprivation** – in 2003, someone from 15-24 would spend 160 minutes a day with a friend. In 2019, that number is now 40 minutes.  
This has led to a rise in **isolation, shallow friendships, superfluous romantic relationships and a stunted view of community.**
- 2) **Sleep Deprivation** – More and more kids are averaging less than 7 hours of sleep at night – almost ½ of teen girls – which means kids cannot concentrate, focus, or remember as well as those teens who get sleep  
We have created **walking zombies**
- 3) **Attention Fragmentation** – Confused, dazed, scatter-brained  
Studies have shown things like ADHD (which is another discussion) was not caused by screen usage, but those students with ADHD were heavier users of smart phones and video games
- 4) **Addiction** (we'd say 'given over to idols') – Though using things like Instagram or playing Fortnite does not mean you are addicted, desires are being **hacked** and their actions **manipulated** by designers – the "HOOK MODEL" of a Trigger ----- Action (click) ---- Reward----- Investment ---- and back to trigger  
Students who have used social media heavily have said, "**Nothing feels good anymore**" when they are not on their desired device or involved in their preferred activity

### **Harm done to Girls:**

It is clear that smartphone usage and social media is MORE harmful to girls than boys, though boys are not immune to the effects (as we'll see):

*"The more immersed in social media the lonelier and depressed you become"*

There is a direct correlation to rising phone/social media use and rise in depression and anxiety

Girls are more prone to **social comparison and seeing their identity through the lens of how others view them** – and social media puts gasoline on the fire

Girls have the seemingly incompatible desire to both **stand out, having an effect on the world, AND a desire to connect and belong.** On social media they are prone to:

- 1) Visual comparisons, especially when it comes to body composition - feeding insecurity
- 2) Boys tend to punch, girls tend to show aggression by harming reputation and relationships with other girls
- 3) Girls tend to more readily share their emotions – and get hurt at that level as well
- 4) Social media has provided places for predators to take advantage of vulnerable girls

Social media becomes a trap that ensnares girls, luring them with the promise of connection and community but only delivering on a high but fickle number of relationships all the while reducing the quality of those relationships.

In her book called **Mobilizing GenZ: challenges and opportunities for the global mission age**, Katy White said this about the idea of **tolerance**, a high value for anyone on social media who wants to find community:

*“Tolerance is often defined differently now than it was in the past. Whereas it once meant seeking to understand and respect others, even if we disregard them, **today it required individuals to accept, affirm, and even celebrate all views as equal and valid.** Morrow defines this as “false tolerance”, which views tolerance as agreement, as opposed to “true tolerance”, which views all people as equal, but not all ideas and behaviors as equal.*

The prevalence of “false tolerance” can create tension for young people today as they develop personal beliefs and convictions. They are hesitant to embrace or voice beliefs that might contradict someone else’s opinion or point of view for fear of being seen as ‘intolerant’. Social media and ‘false tolerance’ have given rise to a powerful form of **public shaming today, often referred to as ‘cancel culture’ or ‘call-out culture.’**

Girls who are given independence on social media are having their identities, convictions, and beliefs shaped by a system that at its core celebrated *moral relativism*, denying God and glorifying man.

#### **Harm for boys:**

Slower digression for boys, but boys have been affected by shunning risk, acting more like girls, and prolonging adolescence “the failure to launch” syndrome

Boys have engaged in far less risky adventures and outdoor activities

The most obvious harm has been the proliferation of **pornography**, since boys have a fire attached to them constantly

Video games have also upped the connection with many but stunted the connection in a quality way, giving boys less of a sense of meaning

#### **Fascinatingly, the secular recommendations to counter all of this:**

- No smartphones before High School
- No social media before 16
- No phones in school
- More unsupervised play and childhood independence

Though I think these are good, they ultimately fall short of Biblical wisdom. Here are Biblical principles to consider in your parenting when it comes to technology:

- 1) **Evaluate your own life, usage, and interaction with technology** – Our kids learn by observation, and they will follow your lead and often move to excess what we did in moderation. Is there

anything in your life in terms of both the **medium** of technology in terms of TIME or the **message** of technology in terms of INFORMATION that needs to change? Are there areas you need to *repent of, meaning a change in thinking, desire, and action*. We are called to “**take every thought captive to obey Christ**” (2 Cor. 10:5), to flee from sexual (and all) immorality (1 Thess. 4:3) and operate in self-control.

- 2) **REGULARLY evaluate your family’s technology intake** – One of the things Erin and I have realized is that as our kids grow, we must continue to adapt, be aware of, and change the decisions that we made even months before.
- 3) **BE CONSISTENT EARLY AND OFTEN – WAIT to impart or give freedom.** We will not give ages or stages in rigid ways of ‘when’ to give your kids a phone, but it is instructive that the designers of Twitter and other social media sights will not allow their kids to have a phone! **YOU ARE THE PARENT**, so you regulate the usage, the intake, and you can say “NO”. Our kids should grow in independence but NOT in independence from our oversight. You should have regular access to your child’s devices and ANY and EVERY interaction online. **DO NOT YIELD TO SOCIAL PRESSURE.**
- 4) **WORK WITH YOUR KIDS AS THEY MATURE** – Just like discipline is like a funnel, so is walking with our kids through this minefield. They should have little to no freedom from 12 and under, but as they get into high school, we want to help them navigate, which means dealing with failure. We’ve dealt with **deception, overuse, and anxiety/depression brought on by being on a phone in our house**. This does not mean we failed as parents, but gave us opportunities to walk in the truth, help correct, see repentance, and work with our daughters in the course correction. When they have seen the downside and the captivation, they are actually **LOOKING** for help as they navigate.
- 5) **Guard your minds and hearts in Christ Jesus** – Proverbs 4:23 – “Guard your heart, for from it flow the springs of life”; “*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 4:7) Christ brings us peace, not anxiety and depression. As parents we are called to guard, protect, and cultivate our children’s heart and mind even more than their bodies. We must be **proactive, not passive** when it comes to technology. There is too great a temptation for **laziness** since when our kids are on their devices they are quiet and not fighting, **giving a false sense of peace**. Less phone time, more personal interaction. Less screen time and more service. Less devices, more play outside. If technology is causing you or your family to stumble, get rid of it, just like Jesus counseled with any sin (Matt. 5:28-29)

We are ultimately NOT of this world, and Jesus prayed this for us in **John 17:14-19**:

*I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth*