

UNPLUGGED:

IMAGING GOD IN A HIGH TECH WORLD



KENMORE BAPTIST CHURCH // LOGOS MINISTRY

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

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UNPLUGGED: IMAGING GOD IN A HIGH TECH WORLD

SMALL GROUP STUDY

Setting the Scene

Tough questions always come when least expected. They put you on the spot. They make you sweat over your intellectual, ethical, and emotional responses to pressing problems that you know are important—wars, poverty, humanity’s origin, God’s existence, globalization, climate change, other religions, eternal destiny—just you planned to think out a well reasoned response over a smooth latté when spare time presented. Sadly, the time never came, and so here you are again, unsure and uncomfortable.

Maybe I’m speaking for you. I’m certainly speaking for myself! As a Christian apologist—that is, one defending and commending the Christian faith as plausible—I’ve often found myself sweating it over a tough question or three coming from left-field, usually while in front of a senior high class, all the while trying to point people to Jesus.

But sadly, for many of us, fear of being unable to answer these tough questions gives us an excuse not to talk about or faith. How many conversations have you avoided because you were afraid that you might be faced with a tough question?

John 1:9 tells us that Christ is the true light that gives light to every person. This is a cornerstone verse for the LOGOS ministry. We are about sharing the light of Christ with others by commending and defending our Christian faith, and equipping our brothers and sisters in Christ to do the same.

This study guide is designed to be used in your small group as a follow on from the message ‘Unplugged: Imaging God in a High Tech World’. You can download the speaker’s notes & slides, an audio of the message, as well as a number of other resources from the following link: <http://logos.kbc.org.au/blog/resources/logos-talks/unplugged/>. At times in this study we’ll be referring to the points made by the panel, so make sure if you weren’t at one of the messages, you check out this site!

- Steve Baso & LOGOS Team

Take it to God

As you open this study, take a few minutes to *commit yourself and your group to God*. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal any sin or blockages keeping you from experiencing God’s manifest presence. Ask for Godly wisdom and discernment thought this study, and commit yourself to honouring Him both throughout this study and as you apply what we talk about to your life.

Talking Point

Has everyone in the group seen at least one of the presentations of ‘Unplugged: Imaging God in a High Tech World?’ (8/10am; 5pm on September 12, 2010)? If there is anyone who hasn’t seen it, the group can summarise it for them, or the video is available from the KBC office or you can download the audio through www.kbc.org.au.

What was your initial response to the message? What made best sense to you? What made the least sense? Was anything missing? How would you have responded to the questions asked of the panel?

Take a few minutes to share your thoughts with the group.

Try This

Ask each group member to write down an answer to the following questions:

How many hours (on average each week), do you think you spend actively using electronic technology (TV, internet, iPod, Wii etc)?

Did you think about?

Mobile Phone Car Facebook Twitter
Online Games Camera DVDs

How many hours (on average each week), do you think you spend actively focusing on God?

Did you think about?

Church Services Worship Small Group STEP courses
Quiet Times Evangelism Kids Church/Rock/89ers/MADShack

Most of us have never thought about our use of time this way. Now that you have, how comfortable are you with the different amounts?

Very uncomfortable; I've never thought about it too deeply before

Quite comfortable; I'm very intentional in how I use my time

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Talking Point

Encourage each group member to share their responses to the above questions, particularly the third one.

Leaders, try to focus the discussion onto the motivations that prompt the use of technology, and avoid too much debate over the "correct" number of hours to be spent on technology each week (contrast someone who spends 10 hours on Facebook reaching out to friends for Christ with someone who spends 10 hours playing Facebook games or posting randomly).

You might think a Christian perspective on technology is a strange apologetic. Yet technology touches on and impacts so many areas of our lives, and in a technologically advanced and obsessed society, technology provides a powerful medium for sharing the gospel. As Christians, we are supposed to be standard bearers for the Kingdom: a sweet aroma to those who are lost (2 Corinthians 2:15), salt and light to a bland and dark world (Matthew 5:13-16). Yet as the above questions demonstrate, most of us have never given much thought to what our use of technology says about the God we represent.

Maybe you've had someone challenge you on this issue already; maybe it's one that you personally have struggled with as an aspect of stewardship. Our hope is that through this study and the accompanying sermon, you will examine yourself, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, bring more of your life into alignment with God's purposes, so you might more clearly commend Christianity and the person of Jesus to those people in your circles of influence that do not know Him.

Talking Point

Take a few minutes and have each group member try to identify positive examples of technology as it relates to their personal life, family or work. Have each person share briefly with the group.

The Big Idea

While we started this study by contrasting the amount of time we devote each week to honouring God with the amount we focus on the use of technology, it is important to recognise that technology has many positive benefits for us personally, for society, and in God's Kingdom.

In the beginning ... God planted a garden and He put us in it. "Be fruitful and multiply!" he said, "fill the earth and subdue it." This is our first mission in the world. Cultivating is hard work, and it takes tools; science and technology are part of God's plan to bless the world and reflect His image. The issue is how do we as Christians view technology?

Technology, like so many things, can be used or abused; every person on the panel gave examples of this, and shortly we'll come up with our own. It's an issue of stewardship: is our use of technology (in whatever form) magnifying or mutilating the image of God in us? Do our devices draw us into God's presence, or depress our desire for His Kingdom?

Each of the panel members was asked a question relating to his or her perception/use of technology:

Dietmar Hutmacher» What makes the difference between a godly and an ungodly use of technology?

Brendan White» How can we display ‘God in us’ in a fast, high tech, high information world?

Sue Chapman» What impact does digital media have on the family unit?

Bec White» How does technology shape our view of the world, and how we engage with the heart of God?

Tammy White » Where do we draw the line so technology brings freedom rather than addiction?

Dave Benson» What is a Christian response to the damage technology is causing the world environmentally?

Split into 6 small groups, and allocate one of the above questions to each group. Take 10 minutes for each group to brainstorm and come up with a short (1 min) response to these questions. Your answer can, but doesn’t have to, incorporate what you remember of the answers given by the LOGOS team.

Talking Point

Invite each group to share their response with the wider group. You will probably find that people have different opinions about most of these questions. Encourage the group to share their viewpoints, but avoid getting sidetracked in an argument.

If the group gets particularly stuck on one of these questions, maybe take a few minutes to listen to the audio of the LOGOS team’s response with that question and jot down anything that stands out.

When we think about the impact and effects of technology, it is easy to identify many positive benefits; the LOGOS panel shared some of them, as have we tonight. But we can just as easily think of negative uses and effects. When we do, we often think on a macro or global scale: weapons of war, advances in medical treatment, internet etc.

But we can see a similar tension in our lives individually when it comes to our attitudes towards technology. Technology has many positive and negative effects on us individually, prompted by our attitudes and underlying motivations. Our use of technology can either magnify or mutilate the image of God in us.

Each of these six questions we looked at revolves around examples of this tension:

Dietmar	<i>What makes the difference between a godly and an ungodly use of technology?</i>	<i>Humility vs Pride</i>
Brendan	<i>How can we display 'God in us in a fast, high tech, high information world?</i>	<i>Transformation vs Information</i>
Sue	<i>What impact does digital media have on the family unit?</i>	<i>Connection vs Fracture</i>
Bec	<i>How does technology shape our view of the world, and how we engage with the heart of God?</i>	<i>Serve vs Self Serve</i>
Tammy	<i>Where do we draw the line so technology brings freedom rather than addiction?</i>	<i>Freedom vs Addiction</i>
Dave	<i>What is a Christian response to the damage technology is causing the world environmentally?</i>	<i>Cultivate vs Consume</i>

Take it to God

For many of the Christians I speak to, it seems that often their use and stewardship of technology is prompted by a desire to serve God. I have often heard of people who have joined social networking sites to be able to witness to friends. However, when you look at their Facebook page, God is nowhere to be seen.

It can be so easy for this tension we have spoken about to subtly slip towards the negative. Often this is without our realising it, masked by our good intentions. As Jeremiah admonishes, our hearts are deceitful and difficult to understand (Jeremiah 17:9).

In all areas of our life we should be sure to keep short account with God, confessing known sin and asking for the Holy Spirit to reveal things within that are hindering us. This is particularly important when it comes to matters of our heart, our intentions and our attitudes. May our prayer be that of the Psalmist:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. – Psalm 139:23-34*

Spend a few minutes in quiet reflection on the this verse and in prayer; ask that God by His Holy Spirit would reveal to you which, if any, of the above tensions you are slipping towards mutilating God's image in you, and seek His empowerment to overcome this tendency so that you might magnify His image within.

So, how can we live lives that magnify God’s image in us, in the context of technology? Do we abandon all electronic media, smash our computers, flush our mobile phones, and sell our cars? Not necessarily!

As part of our witness, we are called to be in the world, but not of the world. To effectively communicate with our culture, we cannot hide ourselves away from technological mediums on which so much of society is dependent. But we need to evaluate our use of it.

The principles Paul expresses in 1 Corinthians chapters 6, 8 and 10 provide a helpful framework to allow us to do this. If you’re unsure if a particular use of technology is magnifying God’s image in you, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is my use beneficial, or does it dominate my life and time? (6:12)
2. Does my use cause another to stumble? (8:13)
3. Does my use build others and myself up, all for the glory of God? (10:23-24, 31-33)

If you’re answering ‘No’ to some or all of these three questions, then you probably need to re-evaluate why you’re pursuing this particular use of technology, and what benefit you’re hoping to reap from it. Remember, Christ came to set us free, and while everything is permissible, not everything is beneficial, and we want to avoid becoming slaves again to anything (John 8:31-36; 1 Corinthians 10:23; Galatians 5:1, 13-26).

Try This

Another quick and easy way to evaluate where you are at with your use of technology is by applying the fruit of the Spirit. Brendan spoke about this during his closing remarks at the end of the panel. (Perhaps take a few minutes and watch this section of the message again.)

Encourage each group member to identify two distinct instances where he or she has used electronic technology in the past 3 days. Now apply some of the fruit of the Spirit to those instances: Am I being loving or truthful while doing? Is helping me be more peaceful?

Challenge

Does our use of technology magnify or mutilate the image of God in us? As God looks at your use of technology, does He declare, “It is very good”?

Let’s each consider, under God, how we will be more authentic and truthful, and practice discernment and moderation in our use of technology. Use the principles we have looked at in this study (the 1 Corinthians 6, 8, 10 questions, and application of the fruit of the Spirit) to ensure that you are seeking to magnify God’s image within, as you seek to shine the light of Christ through your use of technology.

UNPLUGGED: IMAGING GOD IN A HIGH TECH WORLD

Gardening in God's Image [DaveB]

In the beginning ... in the beginning, God planted a garden and He put us in it.

“Be fruitful and multiply!” he said—the only command we’ve kept with a smile. ... But God continued: “fill the earth and subdue it.” This is our first mission in the world. As the Lord God tends and cares for us, we are to tend and care for His garden. When we garden God’s way, we mirror His image to all creation.

“And God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.”

Now I’m not much of a gardener—neither of my thumbs is particularly green. But notice what God *didn’t* say. He didn’t tell us to wander among the trees *el natural*, grabbing fruit off the garden floor and leaving only footprints. Gardening means getting your hands dirty. And God didn’t tell us to garden without a rake. Cultivating is hard work, and it takes tools. In due time Adam and Eve’s descendents would use picks and shovels, jack-hammers and jumper-leads, power tools and personal computers. And to varying degrees, God still pronounces this very good.

Cultivation is what lies behind culture. It’s no coincidence that the Biblical story starts in a garden, and ends in a landscaped city. And as any horticulturalist knows, tending the earth takes study and technique. Science and technology are part of God’s plan to bless the world and reflect His image.

The issue is *how* we journey from the garden to the city. On that tragic day when we ate the forbidden fruit, technology became both a blessing and a curse. Would our techniques to form and transform the world magnify or mutilate the image of God in us? Do our devices draw us into God’s presence, or depress our desire for His Kingdom?

Pretty much everything we see in this room is touched by technology. If we stripped it away, you’d be sitting naked on the ground worshipping God in the dark. (A disturbing thought, I know.) Clothes, books, projectors, microphones, moisturizers—it’s all part of technology. And each of us draws the line at some point.

In Amish communities your clothes can feature buttons, but not zippers—you can *make* buttons, but you’ve got to *buy* zippers. It can seem like semantics: I’m good with eftpos but I won’t use email; Facebook is fine but Twitter wastes time; TV’s entertaining but World of Warcraft is evil. You use zippers, but I stick to buttons. ... There are no easy answers.

But have we unplugged for long enough to get a fresh perspective? Do we unthinkingly upgrade with the crowd? Can we hear God’s still small voice calling us to be a counterculture?

¹ Want a Small Group Guide for this talk, with activities, discussion questions, thought provoking articles, and full notes? Check out <http://logos.kbc.org.au/blog/resources/logos-talks/unplugged/>.

WWJD? Can you picture Jesus updating his online profile while texting Peter to see if there's a better social offer than serving bread and fish to 5000? Maybe. Maybe not. *How would Jesus live in this kind of world?*

An old Chinese proverb says that if you want to know about the water, don't ask a fish. I don't know if you've noticed, but each of us is immersed in an electric ocean. The average young adult crams nearly nine hours of media content—music, television, videos, Internet, and movies—into seven hours' exposure per day. We are totally awash in electronics.

The task of the Logos team in the next while is to give you an out of water experience. If we're seriously about following Jesus and seeking first His Kingdom, then how should we live in an electronic environment? *How do we image God in a high tech world?*

It's time to get unplugged.

To help with this, would you welcome up our panel.

Great to have you all up here! This topic of technology is huge. But of all the facets we could explore, we're focusing in on what most people think when they hear the word 'technology': high-tech, especially digital devices. Now, I don't want everyone here thinking Logos is anti-tech. So to kick things off, let's swing around the panel and introduce who we are, and how technology has been a blessing in our field of work....

Brendan White: Lawyer in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

I'm trained as a lawyer and I work for the Director of Public Prosecutions. (Don't hate me.) In prosecuting people who commit serious crimes I can't overstate how much technology has changed criminal justice systems all over the world. Probably one of the biggest changes is that forensic science has revolutionized how we detect crimes. Think fingerprinting, ballistics, blood splatter patterns, glass comparison, and of course, DNA profiling—these are invaluable in proving crimes occurred. Even the technology in mobile phones is radically changing how we fight crimes. I've lost count of how many people I've prosecuted where the crime was caught on a witness's mobile phone. In terms of crime prevention we use everything from better computer systems for online banking, to better electronic locking and alarm systems and even more CCTV cameras capturing crimes round cities. All of it has made technology integral to making society safer.

Sue Chapman: Professional Actor, Educator, and Full-Time Parent

As I look over the last year of my teaching, technology has provided a huge number of opportunities for kids to engage in Performing Arts. We have played, sung and danced to CDs, and we've videoed the kids and plugged that into the TV so they could watch themselves. We've been able to record special events, use a variety of

electronic music and microphones so performers could be heard. The kids have used printed and photocopied material (legal, of course) and we now have an interactive whiteboard so I can bring the world to them. The kids have edited their own films and gone in short film competitions. We've watched and analysed DVDs, read books, and worn costumes. (Of course there are also lots of other things we haven't tried yet). And all of this is available at their fingertips.

Bec White: Student and Nurse with a heart for Developing Nations

Hi guys, I am Bec, and I am studying to become a nurse with the hope of working in developing nations. Not only do I use computers, the internet, iPods, etc., in my personal life, but also in my field. It's obvious how much technology has helped! Computers give me instant information for quick diagnosis and treatment. Technology gives us lab tests and results at the click of a mouse. We have medications that save lives synthesized in test tubes. Everything to do with my patients is documented on a database which I can access from all over Australia – making care fast and effective. I email people in Mozambique to find out the need. I get on a plane that gets me and the equipment over there in 13 hours. You get the point.

Dietmar Hutmacher: Professor of Regenerative Medicine (QUT)

Good Morning Congregation my name is not White; yet I am a new member of the Logos team. My name is Dietmar Hutmacher. In June 2007 my family and I relocated to Brisbane after 9 years at the National University of Singapore as I was appointed Chair in Regenerative Medicine at QUT. Instead of explaining long-winded how I use technology in my research, I thought it best to show you a short video clip which was recently filmed in my institute.

****CLIP "Face-Off" ****

Well, well, which professor would not love to have John Travolta as a PhD student? Now seriously, in my research work we are using a number of the high tech technologies featured in the clip from the movie "Face Off" to regenerate tissues such as bones, cartilage, and skin. Some of my research work has been "translated from the bench to the bedside" meaning patient's bone, cartilage, and skin were regenerated by those technologies we developed.

Tammy White: Currently completing her Doctor of Psychology (Clinical, USQ)

My name is Tammy White and I'm proudly married to a White. I am completing a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology to become a Clinical Psychologist. Within psychology, I can see how technology really has changed every part of our field. For example, computers have allowed brain imaging using MRIs or PETs and now we know more about the brain than ever. This new knowledge has opened up all sorts of research and understanding about mental health through to how to improve sports performance. We can now also do more types of multimedia research, anything from running car simulations on driving safety, online studies about people's racial beliefs through to what drives blood donation. New creative research has changed so much in our society from improving road safety, how we advertise for blood donors, and

also how we can change racial stereotypes. In clinical psychology, we channelled this new research to understand and treat mental health problems and better treatments are rapidly emerging.

Dave Benson: Pastor of Evangelism and Community Outreach

For anyone who missed the insider joke before, I'm often mocked by fellow KBC staff for being the only person they know without a mobile phone. So for the record, I'm *not* anti-technology!

In terms of my work as a Pastor, technology factors in so heavily. I spend most of the day on a computer—and if you've ever tried reading my handwriting, you'd thank God I can touch type! But my favourite technology would have to be GROUP EMAIL. If someone shoots me an amazing outreach opportunity, within minutes I can get it out to over 400 people. In August's KBC Life, I listed 20 web-sites which cross all cultural boundaries to connect people with Jesus. My Auntie does internet evangelism ... each morning while sipping coffee in her Melbourne house, she answers emails from Muslim women over in Iran. So, for me, electronics and evangelism work well together.

Well, introductions are over. We've already seen how technology has been a blessing in so many ways. No surprises there—but what we often struggle to see is how the technology we take for granted is a two-edged sword. So let's switch gears and explore a range of perspectives—medical technology, noise, parenting, poverty, overuse, and the environment. In each, ask yourself, "Does my use of technology magnify or mutilate the image of God in me? ... How would Jesus have me live?"

First up is Dietmar ...

****Dave Question > DIETMAR answer re: MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY****
HUMILITY vs. PRIDE
(Dave to Respond)

DB question to DH: Di, you work with some pretty amazing medical technology that has changed people's lives for the better. Yet it seems that the longer our lives become, the less we rely on God. What makes the difference between a godly and an ungodly use of technology?

DH: Dave after more than twenty years in industry and academia I've come to the conclusion that in my research field, technology is used in an UNGODLY way if it leads scientists to pride rather than humility—meaning, they worship the fruits of their minds and technology through the works of their hands! To give you an example: I can take stem cells from your bone marrow and combine them with scaffolds made from biomaterials and lasers and bioreactors you did see in the movie and regenerate cartilage in the complex shape of an ear. More than 10 years ago I watched with humility the joy of a German father, together with his wife and sons, after our team did exactly that—we regrew him an ear which was cut off in a machine accident in the Black Forest. On the other hand I have colleagues who misuse the same technology and have proudly developed concepts and even business

plans to finance their research to use cloning to engineer sons and daughters whose only purpose is to provide spare body parts in case their siblings become seriously ill or have a major accident.

I feel incredibly blessed from GOD to be empowered to develop technologies which can make a major change in a patient's life. Yet, I am fully aware that without the moral resistance and humility of Christ I am on the edge of going astray in the use of my ability and the technology I develop. I have realized as a biomedical engineer, but far more as a believer, that I can regenerate tissues of the body but only GOD can create and regenerate a human soul through faith in the Creator.

DaveB RESPONSE: Di, great thoughts in what you said. It's a fine line between cultivating the world to make life better, and trusting in technology as our Saviour. C. S. Lewis explored this in his book *The Abolition of Man*. He noticed that the ancient virtue was to cultivate character so I could face any circumstance with courage. But the modern virtue is to use science to control my environment, so I can stay exactly as I am. That's the empty-chested man ... shiny on the outside, but no heart.

Technology can do a lot of things, but it will never defeat death. This is something we've all got to face. I've even seen Christians put so much faith in some solution to their sickness, that they never took the time to prepare to meet their maker.

This is so different to how it was with my nanna. When she got cancer for the third time, she decided it was time to give up fighting, and start transitioning. Nik and I had the privilege of sitting with her on her nursing home bed, sucking in air with the 20 percent of a lung she had left. We massaged her feet. We lay there listening to a swooning concerto on CD. And we read from Henri Nouwen how the way we die is the final gift we give to the world. She was totally at peace. Still. Safe in the arms of her heavenly father. Building character and dying well is Christlike—it's a way to image God that I hope we rediscover in this high tech world.

****Dave Question > BRENDAN answer re: NOISE****
TRANSFORMATION vs. INFORMATION
(Dietmar to Respond)

DB question to BW: *In today's tech savvy world it seems that every minute of the day, we're bombarded with information, and we're drowning in noise—we flick on the t.v., plug into our iPod, retrieve our voice mail, and can't seem to find a way to just reflect and be quiet. Yet we worship a God who calls us away to hear His still, small voice. Now, God's not against information and noise, but His bigger concern is transformation. How can we image God in this sort of world?*

BW: I think Dave B is spot on that our society is awash in information and noise. As Christians it's worth considering how we can deal with all this on our faith journey with God. Generally there is great power in slowing things down, in taking time to really live and enjoy the moment, and in building margin into your life so your plate isn't always full. In the business of our lives, spending some quiet time with God in the early morning, just as Jesus did, can be a powerful way to stay connected

to God. I have at times found my work life quite stressful, so this year to help I started mediating on Scriptures in the morning and I've found that does help restore a feeling of balance.

These are principles I've found the most helpful, but I want to bring it home with an example about TV. I have a bit of a love hate relationship with television. I do love to watch TV and the problem is it's too easy to just come home from a long day and tell yourself you 'need' to zone out for an hour. So when Tam and I got married in 2007 we decided we wouldn't own a TV. Now that's a decision that we'll review as life goes on but for our first few years of marriage we decided we'd rather spend our evenings together doing fun things like making dinners, or talking, or reading or having prayer times, rather than watching an hour or so of TV each night. It was one less noise that affected our lives or took up our time day to day.

That said I still do watch TV when I go to my mum's on the weekend. I love it too much not to and I've been watching a show with celebrity chef Jamie Oliver where he's gone to the unhealthiest town in America and he is trying to get them to learn to cook healthy food. Anyone else seen this? In some ways if I watched that and enjoyed it, I could be in danger of missing the very point the show is making. Instead it's inspired me; so much so that for the first time in my life I'm learning to cook from scratch. And it's becoming one of my favourite leisure time activities!

Now I'm not saying that Christians shouldn't own a television or that you can't watch some meaningless programs now and again. The point is that we live in an information society where it can become so easy to be spectators rather than participants. We can like watching something on TV more than actually doing it ourselves. Part of the answer of living in the modern world, is to be discerning and aware of what we are doing. Using TV as an example is to consider what we are watching and how much we are watching.

DietmarH RESPONSE: Brendan let me tell you a story about the time I used the television wrongly as a companion to relax. From September to December 2000 I had an extraordinarily stressful time as I was building my lab and research group at NUS and at the same time writing my PhD thesis; meaning I spent 8-10 hours in the lab and then another 4 to 5 hours on my PhD thesis. When I would get home around 11pm I would take my dinner in front of the TV and spent 2-3 hours in front of it zapping around from channel to channel—instead of relaxing and getting the needed sleep. After I submitted my thesis just after Christmas the family and I flew out for a 3-week holiday at Magarete River. After we arrived in Perth I sporadically got chest pain, which got worse from day to day even as we had a fantastic time at the beach and the vineyards. At night I would only catch 3 to 4 hours of sleep as I was addicted to the TV. In the afternoon of New Years Eve I confessed to Marika what was happening to me as I thought I was close to a heart attack. We immediately drove to the emergency clinic in Magarete River. I got a full medical check up and the Kiwi doctor told me that there was nothing wrong with my physiology but that I was totally screwed up in my head because my mind did not get any rest for the last 5 months. He told me no more TV! Instead get a couple of good books and get loose—and guess what: *it worked!*

****Dave Question > Sue (AM ONLY) answer re: FAMILY****

CONNECT vs. FRACTURE

(No Response)

DB question to SC: Sue, you and your family are involved in the entertainment business. Yet, you don't have a TV! Some might see this as a double-standard. What's the thinking here? How do you use digital media in a way that works for you as a family?

SC: We may need to limit the type of technology we're referring to in this discussion. If technology means the physical apparatus invented to aid living then technically clothes are technology and I'm all for wearing clothes. Even the Amish wear clothes. So I'm going to look at TV and computers.

It's not simple is it? When the kids are being feral it's a relief to stick them in front of the TV, it's fun to watch State of Origin together (except if Mikka's in the room) and your favourite program can be your down time. But try to have a family meal at the table, create peace in the house or get the kids to do their homework and the TV becomes another stupid screen to battle.

We're all familiar with the more overt media messages that come to our kids. They are told they must have the right clothes, toys, food and be seen at the right places or they're not proper people. Keeping up with the Joneses used to be an adult preoccupation but now if a kid doesn't have or like all the right stuff they fall off the social radar. And as kids crave social acceptance, that is huge.

Kids will copy anyone they think is cool and powerful, so the bloke who plays an awesome game of footy and the girl who is size 8 with a perfect face are their idols, never mind that the bloke bashes up his girlfriend and the girl's political views go like, "And the Iraq and all the people, and they don't have maps."

By age 3 girls can buy Brittany Spears bras (why?)—they learn early on their body is a commodity, it's all about 'pay and display'.

Movies glorify the immature. Today you don't 'grow out' of childish behaviour, instead, if you don't still behave like that, you've 'lost it'. Socializing is often about skeletal language typed onto a computer, loud music, and getting drunk. Forget hanging out and talking, going on picnics or helping people. Face to face is scary, we've become used to the faceless disembodied voice and those who serve us in our society are treated with less and less respect. Several activities are undertaken at the same time with only partial attention being given to each task. Music accompanies everything like inescapable aural wallpaper.

Media storylines feature heroes and heroines who blithely jump into bed with each other and yet have perfectly happy relationships. Then our kids try to copy them and wonder where the happily-ever-after's gone. The media tells our kids that they are the center of the universe (do they need reminding?) and after 25 everything is downhill. Older people are portrayed as obsolete and useless. The message is that youth carry the problems of the world on their shoulders and nobody else understands. Life becomes a soap opera—"Mum !! We've run out of Fruit Fuzzies!!"

In a world of globalisation we can no longer shine in our small village. Kids compare themselves to the very best and, finding themselves wanting, decide not to have a go. Problems are huge and overwhelming, the task seems impossible and kids feel they have no voice, they are powerless to fix anything.

In his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman, explains that the type of technology we use to express ideas strongly affects what those ideas will be. We live now in The Age of Show business, addicted to amusing ourselves. We've moved from a print-based culture that encouraged us to question what was real to an image-based culture that tells us what is real. Religion, politics, education, news, sex—everything has to amuse and entertain. It's all about ratings and money.

The movie, *Inception*, is closer to us than we suspect: it's about creating an idea in someone and then convincing them it's theirs. For example, “look at all these things, they'd make you feel good wouldn't they, you want them, you need them, and because your needs matter and you have the power, you can jolly well get them,” or “here is your idol, you want to be just as powerful and popular as this don't you, so be an individual and choose to copy your idol—guaranteed social success!”

Images change constantly, camera angles flip, information is at the touch of a button, it's fast-paced and high-powered and to a modern generation if it's not like that it's boring. They're ending up with the concentration span of a goldfish. They live in sound bites and grabs. They crave novelty: “Oh Dad, that is so like totally last week!!” Excess rules. Subtlety is forgotten. What's next? Quadruple Choc shakes?? Kids talk in bites: “Tots, LOL.”

There is no cohesive proposition behind it—“Commonwealth Games preparation is behind schedule,” “An elderly woman was brutally bashed in her home,” “The Broncos won 10-4” and “Tomorrow Brisbane will be fine.”

We have been seduced into a spectator's experience of life, forgetting how to think and discouraged from digging too deep. We learn to choose our leaders not on careful study of the issues involved but on how credible we think they are on TV. Young couples will spend months on choosing finery for their weddings and almost no time on meaningful counseling for their marriage relationship. It's become a surface life of second degree living, once removed from real living. That distance means a lack of accountability, responsibility and empathy and that's how relationships starve. We've got lots of calories but no vitamins, lots of stuff happening but no real connections. Life has become more about nouns than verbs; it's about commodities instead of actions.

So how does that all affect us? Each generation grows up with less patience and that affects what we expect from our relationships. We want a pill or a button to fix everything. Many kids will leave home expecting their own house to look like the Ikea catalogue. Endurance, resilience and waiting are unfashionable. Our ability to work on something without instant gratification is dwindling. Our rapid response technology, though it saves us hours each day, has not given us more time for each other. Though we can travel to more people and places we have lost the true intimacy of community and family. We can become strangers in the busy crush of humanity and people who just happen to live in the same house.

Jesus saw to the heart of the matter, he could discern truth. That's our aim. Our kids need support from parents and church to know they are unique and valuable and can make a difference, what makes a good man and a good woman and how to tell truth from spin. We have a responsibility to bring the gift of perspective to our kids. That should be how we engage with technology—in the world but not of it.

We need to be aware of how today's technologies seek to mould us. The question is not, "Should we have TVs and computers," but, "As a family, do we use technology to bring up a generation of jaded kids whose purpose is to be entertained or a generation of hopeful kids whose purpose is to love, connect and serve?"

****Dave Question > Bec (PM ONLY) answer re: WORLD****
SERVE vs. SELF-SERVE
(No Response)

DB question to BW: *Bec, as I read the Bible, God has a big heart for the hurting of this world—the poor, the hungry, the outcast, the abused. How does technology shape our view of the world, and how we engage with the heart of God?*

BW: Well, picture this: You are in your lounge room, eating dinner with the TV on. While you munch on your chicken drumstick, a World Vision ad pops onto the screen... there in your living room, just like that, is the world of poverty stricken children in Tanzania, or Kenya, or rural Asia. Luke 4 tells us God has a heart for the poor and hurting of our world. He asks us to bring them freedom physically and spiritually. And in 30 seconds we can be connected to God's heart and ways to help and we haven't even left the couch! Am I right? But here is the thing: technology like this can affect our outlook in two ways—it can aid us to serve, or aid us to self serve.

Most of us know that God's heart is for us to grow in relationship with Him so that we can serve others. And each of us here can use technology to grow in faith. We have podcasts online, recorded sermons and conferences, access to resources for youth groups, small groups, counseling needs—everything. To learn about the heart of God now, thanks to technology, is only a few clicks away. There is a cyber world of steroids for Christian muscle! And with the aid of cameras, television, radio, and the internet, we can visualise the need. In a culture of self absorption we are confronted with images of the poor and hungry and the opportunity to donate money or be a part of worthy causes. It would seem that as Africa enters our houses we finally get the 'big picture' of the world and how to meet the needs. It would seem that technology has assisted us in engaging with the heart of God to meet the need of others. And yes, this is partially true. But God asks for more than *awareness* of the need. He asks for our lives to *meet* the need.

There is no way around it. Technology has driven our way of thinking. Whilst it *can* help us serve, it subtly shapes the opposite attitude: *becoming self serving*. Many of us here have been raised in an environment of push button responses, instant satisfaction, and machines. "So what?" you might think, "I can donate at the click of a mouse to those kids on TV!" True, but those kids don't disappear when the TV turns off. We go on eating, no longer disturbed but instead desensitized. What is the price

we pay if that becomes our collective attitude? It breeds frustration and impatience with slower and less direct methods of achieving our goals. *Character is not built at the push of a button.* Relationships don't form with a mouse click.

God wants us to learn virtues which are often the opposite of those technology fosters. Learning peace doesn't happen by turning the music down. But endurance is unfashionable. As Christians our deepest pursuit is to know God. Are we replacing that relationship with more noise in our ears and less time on our knees? We must not forget that skimming one chapter, a short devotional, and hearing a thrilling podcast cannot replace time and the discipline of prayer and meditating on the Bible. This time last year I noticed my mouth did a lot of talking and my fingers a lot of clicking. But God has called us to be action takers. Not in virtual streets but real streets. Every fortnight a group of us from KBC go into the streets and places of need in Ipswich to love people with food and relationship. Unfortunately technology doesn't bring the homeless to my house or the food to their stomachs. Authentic service and substantial relationships with God and others are going to cost us more than a new iPod or a laptop. Technology can be a good tool, if we remember to use technology to aid in serving God.

So, *what principles do you learn from technology?* That you can get things quickly with minimal work? That God's heart for us to serve fades right along with the ads on TV? My point? *How do you use technology: to serve or to self-serve?*

****Dave Question > Tam answer re: INTERNET OVERUSE****
FREEDOM vs. ADDICTION

(Video Response via Clip #3 ... see below)

DB question to TW: Tammy, we've seen how technology changes our lives—we have all kinds of devices to make our days easier. But how much is too much? Where do we draw the line so technology brings freedom rather than addiction?

TW: Well, I guess I see technology like chocolate: It tastes good, it can be addictive, too much is bad for your health, and parents like children to believe it doesn't exist! I think the same thing can be said about technology. Unless we are aware of the way we are using technology in our lives, it can easily begin to rule us rather than it being a positive and useful medium in our lives.

Now I don't want to sound doom and gloom because, let's face it, technology can be fun to use and really useful. Brendan and I are enjoying the benefits of new gadgets having recently invested in a GPS, after some strong prompting from our 5-year old nephew. And I must admit, it is much nicer not worrying about how to get somewhere. And Internet on our phone means we can check for urgent emails from anywhere.

With all of these gizmos freely available and ready to simplify our life, is there a point when it goes from convenience to an addiction, from something enjoyable to a must have in our life?

For instance, how many of us check our Facebook or email through the day and don't think twice about it? Do you sneak a peak at your phone during meetings or

coffee to check for messages—or even a church service? We have so much technology that without realizing it, our day isn't normal without it.

The question, though, really isn't, *How much technology do I use?* Instead, ask this: *What am I like when my technology is taken away?* Do you involuntarily tap your fingers with no computer; do start thinking of life events in terms of good Facebook posts; or do you imagine your phone going off with a message every three minutes? We have become a culture of techno junkies who need our technology fix. So much so that a recent online survey found 1 out of 3 women aged 18-34 check Facebook as the first in the morning even before going to the bathroom; while 1 in 5 will check it in the middle of the night. Online gaming and pornography addictions are at an all time high. Technology seems to hold an allure of escapism that means we lose living a real life. Jesus set the example for us to follow and He lived his life in relationship. Life isn't lived through a virtual box or Facebook but in the living and breathing real world. I guess we could ask ourselves, *What are we living in and what world are we opening up for our kids?*

Now on top of us being hooked more to technology, our bodies are starting to pay the price. Even using an iPod is not health neutral. Using iPod ear phones for more than 1 hour per day at loud volumes have been related to premature hearing loss.

In Australia, a study found that that people who view TV for more than 4 hours per day are 80% more likely to die from heart disease.

All this technology use is changing is from the 'outdoor climb a hill on the weekend' Australians to couch potatoes. Technology is meant to make life easier or bring enjoyment, not kill us!

The question is, *How do you use technology?* Like chocolate, do you eat too much? Are you addicted? Is your health suffering? Or, do your kids have open access? Technology is like chocolate: best consumed in moderation.

DB intro to video clip. Thanks Tammy. Probably the latest form of technology addiction is through multi-player online games. Check out this clip for a documentary called "second skin."

DVD CLIP "Second Skin"

****Brendan Question > Dave answer re: ENVIRONMENT****
CULTIVATE vs. CONSUME
(Tammy to Respond)

BW question to DB: *Dave, you've confessed to not being much of a gardener. But we're in a world just waking up to the problem of environmental damage. And in most cases the blame is laid at the door of the western world and its high tech habits. How should we as Christians respond?*

DB: This really should concern us. Some Christians act like the environment is a non-issue ... that God just wants us to rescue souls from a burning building before the world goes up in flames. But this is *not* the Biblical story.

It's more like that Discovery Channel ad ... you know the one with the astronauts floating in outer space looking with wonder at this beautiful blue planet. "It kinda' makes you wanna' break into song! ... I love the whole world." *Well that's God's heart!* He made this garden planet. And He created us to be gardeners. So if things are falling apart, we need to get our hands dirty. Weeding is part of God's work too.

So, how does this relate to technology? Simple, two ways: wastage, and want.

So, *wastage* first. In the west, we chew through a huge amount of energy to run our cars, t.v.'s, sound systems, computers, and other technology. And when we're done with these devices, we bury tonnes of rubbish in the ground, out of sight, out of mind. Products even have built-in-obsolescence to guarantee that within a couple of years we'll be back in the store for an upgrade. Just when I got flat screen plasma, in came 3D tv's! Meanwhile the planet is groaning. We're blissfully unaware of deforestation, salination, and 800 of God's species facing imminent extinction.

If every person in the world lived like we do, then we'd need 6 planet earths to provide ... which *could* be a problem! We've only got one.

Which brings me to the second issue: *want*. Gandhi once said "There is enough for everybody's need, but not enough for anybody's greed." It raises the question, *how much do we really need?* How much have you spent this year upgrading phones, internet plans, laptops and the like? Where does all my money go?

Did you know that forty percent of the world's population live on less than two dollars a day, and 850 million people remain underfed? So which is more important: purchasing a bigger t.v., or sponsoring a starving child? *What would Jesus do?* Happiness isn't high tech. In God I can be content with or without an iPhone.

I don't know what this means for you, but in my life it means pausing before my next purchase to ask God, "*Do I really need this?*" What will this purchase, or that product, cost the world as a whole? Imagine a world where each of us ignored the advertising and minimized our waste. Imagine if we each lived so simply that we had twice the money to give away to those in need. Imagine if my next 'upgrade' was to downsize ... where the new device is cheaper, smaller, more energy efficient, and easier to recycle than what it replaced.

We need wisdom to deal with our wastage and want. If I'm to image God in a high tech world, then I need to deal with my over-consumption and coveting, and instead learn how to cultivate godly contentment.

TammyW RESPONSE: Dave what you said really resonates with me as God has deeply challenged me about this—about how much energy I consume using technology through to how I get rid of gizmos and waste in my life. I now think about how many times I use the washing machine during the day, what toilet paper I use, turning my computer or lights off through the day, and finding the best way to recycle. I know that these are small things but these are powerful ways we can reduce the impact we make on the world.

Imaging God in a High Tech World [BrenW]

We've done this panel today because technology touches on and impacts so many areas of our lives. I hope that today's panel has been good food for thought. That's really what we wanted to do. Getting you thinking about living as Christians in this technologically advanced and perhaps a bit obsessed age of ours. Most of the panel members have shared experiences or ideas about technology from their lives. Some of their responses may have inspired you to think or do things differently—fingers crossed! The point though wasn't for one of us to give all the answers but to help people think more intelligently about these issues.

Often when people talk about technology there are two extremes that come out. One is to avoid it completely, sort of like the Amish or those in the monastic life. But withdrawing from society to avoid technology, or anything, isn't the answer. Christ wants us to be in the world but not of it. We're his lights on a hill and we shouldn't be covered up. That said, the other extreme is to embrace technology as an answer to the world's problems. That of course isn't the right approach either. Historically new technology can bring just as many problems as it solves. But the world's problems—the starvation, wars, slave trafficking—these are ultimately problems of the heart.

That's because it's not technology that makes us evil. It's not our cars and traffic jams that cause road rage. *It's us.* It's sin. Jesus said it's "what comes out of a man's heart that makes him defiled." Technology may help but Christ is the final answer.

Dave B started this message by talking about how the Biblical story began in a garden and ends in a city. Dave was spot on in his comment that science and technology are part of God's plan to bless the world and reflect his glory. But there is a risk that without thoughtful evaluation we might miss why God's given us the ability to create more advanced technology. At the end of the day, shouldn't the whole point of technology be to improve our lives? Not just to increase our personal enjoyment, but to really improve the things that matter, like our relationships with family, friends, and God. The challenge from today's message is *how we use technology, magnifying or mutilating the image of God in us.*

So I want to close in a really practical way, and land how you can evaluate your use of technology. One of the ways our panel explored in preparing this message was to consider *the fruits of the Spirit*. In Ephesians the fruit of the Spirit are said to be *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. So a really practical thing to do is to apply the fruits of the Spirit to your use of technology.

So, for example, take *truth*. Am I being truthful in what I write on Facebook, in an e-mail, in a text message or on a chat page? Technology can allow us to portray ourselves in ways that are less than authentic: put up certain pictures on Facebook, write certain updates, or even how we speak in e-mails. The Christian answer to all this may not be to give up the medium, but to simply be refreshingly *authentic and truthful*.

Another example is the fruit of *peace*. Is my use of TV, radio, iPod, iPhone, or GPS system, helping me become more or less peaceful?

Or the fruit of *self-control*. Am I in control when I am using technology, is it making me worse at controlling myself or better? Sometimes when my Navman gets me lost and says “recalculating” I start to lose it.

Simple questions like these might help guide a person in deciding if they need to change how they are using technology.

And a final principle might be *discernment and moderation*. To be discerning in how much technology we use and perhaps moderate our use better. The same is true about how much information we consume. We live in a time in history where information is everywhere, coming at us incessantly from so many different sources. It takes the wisdom of moderation to know how much of that noise we should be tuning into.

An example for me is through the Pathways ministry here at KBC. Twice a year I run through STEP 2 or 3 with a group of guys. And during the course we ask participants to *fast* from something important for the 10 weeks of the course. For me I’ll often give up one of the things I love the most: Strawberry Quick. [*If no laughing say “funny I thought you’d mock that.”*] Yes I have a mild addiction not to anything manly like beer, but to a child’s drink. Moving on. Usually in each of my STEPS groups one or more of the guys will *fast from an electronic medium* like Facebook, or watching TV or an information medium like reading the newspaper everyday. The results are usually the same. They find they have more time for reflection, prayer, Bible reading and more opportunities to engage with family and friends.

Today’s message was called ‘*Unplugged: Imaging God in a High Tech World*’. That’s exactly the challenge I want to leave you with today. *Perhaps it’s time to get unplugged from some technology or media or information to really allow God’s image to gain greater resolution.* I regularly fast from food during the year, I usually do a fast one day a week or so and I often fast for a week at a time. It’s not because I don’t love food: I do, a lot. But fasting from something like food actually gives you more time to focus on food.

Well perhaps having heard this message *prayerfully consider some kind of media fast for this week.* Maybe you’ll give up watching TV, or Facebook, or reading the paper everyday or all of those things. See what you make of it, but my guess is as you dial down some of the other noises of life, and take that time to focus on God, you’ll feel richer for it.

Let’s Pray.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. God pronounced that “It is very good!” over all He had created. As God surveys our technological advances, how “good” would He assess it to be today? Explain.
2. In what ways does your use of technology magnify God’s image in you?
3. In what ways does your use of technology mutilate God’s image in you?
4. Reflect on how your use of technology leads to either
 - a. Humility or Pride
 - b. Transformation or Information
 - c. Connection or Fragmentation
 - d. Serving or Self-Serving
 - e. Freedom or Addiction
 - f. Cultivating or Consuming

What two changes in your patterns would bring the greatest change for good?

5. Does all the information and noise constantly coming at us in modern life make it harder to hear from God? If yes what can I do about that?
6. What can I do to stay meaningfully connected with God in today’s world?
7. Has my use of technology made me more of a spectator than a participant? (An example might be to like watching sport more than playing sport, or listening to Christian messages on DVD/MP3 more than applying them).
8. Can I be more discerning in what technology/media/information I use and consume?
9. Should I exercise more moderation in my use and consumption of technology/media/information. How much do I use? Is it too much?
10. Consider applying some of the fruits of the Spirit against your use of technology:
 - a. Am I truthful when using technology (such as Facebook, text messaging, chat pages, Blogs and e-mails).
 - b. Am I more or less peaceful in my use of technology (such as radio, TV, iPhone).
11. Prayerfully considering taking up the challenge to fast from one or more mediums involving technology/media/information.

Recommended Reading

Rob Bell, *Noise*, Nooma DVD #09.

Peter Berger, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*.

Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*.

Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Call*.

John Dyer, “Don’t Eat the Fruit: Technology is Fast, but Redemption is Slow.”
(Web page: <http://donteatthefruit.com/>)

Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*.

Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*.

Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*. [n.b. This book is a more recent edition of *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, so probably don’t bother reading both!]

Gerard Kelly, *Retrofuture: Rediscovering Our Roots, Recharting Our Routes*.

C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*. (See Chapter 3 in particular ... available online at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/lewis/abolition3.htm>)

Peter Nowark, *Sex, Bombs And Burgers: How War, Porn And Fast Food Created Technology As We Know It*.

Nnamdi Godson Osuagwu, *Facebook Addiction: The Life & Times of Social Networking Addicts*.

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*.

Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*.

Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community*.

Quentin Schultze, *Habits of the High Tech Heart: Living Virtuously in the Information Age*.

An Ancient Dialogue: Plato's "Phaedrus," retelling the story of King Thamus of Upper Egypt dialoguing with the god Theuth the Inventor

[From Chapter 1 of Neil Postman's "Technopoly"]

Background: In Plato's *Phaedrus*, he recounts Socrates telling this legend to his friend, Phaedrus, to instruct him wisely in weighing the value of various technologies. Thamus was the King of a great city of Upper Egypt, and in this story, he entertained the god Theuth, who was the inventor of many things including number, calculation, geometry, astronomy, and writing. Theuth exhibited his inventions to King Thamus, claiming that they should be made widely known and available to Egyptians.

Socrates continues:

Thamus inquired into the use of each of them [the inventions], and as Theuth went through them expressed approval or disapproval, according as he judged Theuth's claims to be well or ill founded. It would take too long to go through all that Thamus is reported to have said for and against each of Theuth's inventions. But when it came to writing, Theuth declared, "Here is an accomplishment, my Lord the King, which will improve both the wisdom and the memory of the Egyptians. I have discovered a sure receipt for memory and wisdom." To this, Thamus replied, "Theuth, my paragon of inventors, the discoverer of an art is not the best judge of the good or harm which will accrue to those who practice it. So it is in this; you, who are the father of writing, have out of fondness for your off-spring attributed to it quite the opposite of its real function. Those who acquire it will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of by their own internal resources. What you have discovered is a receipt for recollection, not for memory. And as for wisdom, your pupils will have the reputation for it without the reality: they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant. And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society."

The Point, as Postman makes it: Technology is both a blessing and a burden. Unlike Thamus, we must equally note and weigh the benefits of any technological innovation—such as writing—which typically are many. "Nonetheless, we are currently surrounded by throngs of zealous Theuths, one-eyed prophets who see only what new technologies can do and are incapable of imagining what they will *undo*. We might call such people Technophiles. They gaze on technology as a lover does on his beloved, seeing it as without blemish and entertaining no apprehension for the future. ... On the other hand, some one-eyed prophets, such as I (or so I am accused), are inclined to speak only of burdens (in the manner of Thamus) and are silent about the opportunities that new technologies make possible. The technophiles must speak for themselves, and do so all over the place. My defense is that a dissenting voice is sometimes needed to moderate the din made by the enthusiastic multitudes. If one is to err, it is better to err on the side of Thamusian skepticism" (pp. 3-5).

To Mull Over: For the various high-tech options you have incorporated into your everyday life, what benefits and burdens have they introduced? How have these technologies been both a blessing, and a curse? How have they helped, and what have they *undone*? Perhaps the most fundamental question is this: *Does my use of technology magnify, or mutilate, the image of God in me?* ... How, then, would Jesus have you respond?

MOBILE PHONES ... “A Label I’m Learning to Embrace” by Dave Benson²

No one likes being called names: *Ignoramus, Incompetent Boob, Fundamentalist, Fatso*. Often the abuse has a scintilla of substance, albeit couched in an *ad hominem* that distracts from one’s own shortcomings. But the latest label thrown my way really hurt: *Luddite*. That’s right, someone called me a ‘Luddite’.

How would you feel? I was shocked. Partly because of the scathing tone: “Lluddite!” But mostly because I had no idea what it meant. My self-image as a walking lexicon was shaken.

So I did some research. First, *context*. The detractor applied the label when he discovered *I have no mobile phone*. (Or cell phone for my North American counterparts!) “Who in this day and age doesn’t have a mobile? ... You Lluddite!” *Ouch*. So I’m guessing this was a not-so-subtle technological swipe.

Second, *history*. Resisting the urge to google this insult, I reached for a copy of *Technopoly* sitting on my shelf. Social critic Neil Postman might shed some light. (Pause for page flicking.) Ah, the Luddite Movement began with the actions of a youth named *Ludlum*. (An unfortunate start to be sure.) His father asked him to fix a malfunctioning weaving machine, but instead Ludlum destroyed the devilish device. Devilish, because between 1811 and 1816, this contraption had replaced skilled fabric workers, resulting in wage cuts, child labour, unemployment, and widespread discontent. In Postman’s words, “since then the term ‘Luddite’ has come to mean an almost childish and certainly naïve opposition to technology.”³

“Could this be me?” I wonder. Am I a Luddite simply because I neither possess nor know how to use a mobile phone? Granted, I have broken electronic equipment over the years; recently I ran my friend’s iPod through a washing cycle before hanging it out to dry, still secure in his jeans pocket. But I’ve never *intentionally* destroyed any device. Maybe not owning a phone was such a countercultural stance that I should be considered a naïve opponent of technology?

Postman continued: “But the historical Luddites were neither childish nor naïve. They were people trying desperately to preserve whatever rights, privileges, laws, and customs had given them justice in the older world-view.”

Perhaps there was some substance to this stinging attack. Now, I’m not judging others for having a mobile. If I worked as a courier, a cell phone would be indispensable. And I don’t believe I’m a hypocrite to borrow a friend’s phone and tell my wife I’ll be late home. But I do resent how we unthinkingly adopt the latest and greatest without ever asking how it affects all our lives.

In many ways, I liked life better *BME* (*before mobiles existed*). *BME* my yes was a yes and my no was a no. I was organized enough to turn up when I should; I wouldn’t hold off to see if a better social offer came my way, forcing last minute changes of plan. *BME* I could hold a sustained conversation without interruption, eye-contact and all, without my best friend glancing under the table to text his girlfriend. And *BME* you could still track me down in the case of an emergency. I was accessible, but not so convenient that you would divulge trivial details better kept to yourself, or treat me like a tool to accomplish tasks truly your own.

In this age when I’m already a digital fish swimming in radio waves, occasionally I need some shelter. I wonder if there is such a thing as “too contactable”—leave a message for me at the Coffee Club if you must, but don’t make out like the world fell apart because I wasn’t a text away.

Thus endeth my rant. Though I do think there is something more significant at stake than destruction of a weaving machine or avoidance of a mobile. *Identity* is the issue. In subtle ways, we all begin to reflect the technology we use. To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Or, as Postman extends the truism, “To a man with a camera, everything looks like an image. To a man with a computer, everything looks like data.”⁴ And to a person with a mobile, everything looks like a text message. I’m not made in the image of a phone. But I do believe I’m made in the image of a loving God, who respects people as people, and objects as objects. And never shall the twain meet.

Maybe one day I’ll purchase a mobile, and then “Luddite” will give way to “Sell Out.” But until that day, I’m learning to embrace this label. My only wish is that the way I use technology will magnify rather than mutilate God’s image in me.

² First published on <http://wonderingfair.com/>, September 2010.

³ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 43.

⁴ Postman, *Technopoly*, 14.

BOOK SUMMARY: NEIL POSTMAN, “Amusing Ourselves to Death”

Premise: The form in which ideas are expressed affects what those ideas will be. That is, following Marshall McLuhan, “*The medium is the message.*”

Introduction: We have a bottomless appetite for TV and are overwhelmed by an information glut. We don't care what we've lost as long as we're being amused. There is no reflection time any more, try having an e-media fast for 24 hrs. There are questions about technology and media – what happens when we become infatuated and then seduced by them? Do they free or imprison us? Are the trade-offs worth it?

1. ***The Medium is the Metaphor*** : Our politics, news, religion, athletics, education and commerce transformed into adjuncts of show business and no-one cares or notices – descent into vast triviality. Message = specific, concrete statement about the world. Metaphor = forms of our media unobtrusive but powerful implications to enforce their special definitions of reality.
2. ***Media as Epistemology***: Content of much of our public discourse has become dangerous nonsense. We measure a culture by what it claims to be significant. Definitions of truth derived partly from character of media communication.
3. ***Typographic America***: High literacy in USA in 17th Century, Luther's emphasis on reading the bible, laws passed on reading and writing (reading not elitist), printing press = metaphor and epistemology to create serious and rational public conversation.
4. ***The Typographic mind***: Audiences accustomed to extended oratorical performances (respectful, long attention span, extraordinary capacity to comprehend spoken word, historically and politically knowledgeable), think perceptually, deductively and sequentially
5. ***The Peek-a-boo World***: Transportation and communication could be disengaged from each other, with electricity information could be moved anywhere. Rise of the press – sensationalism. Photography – dismembers reality, based on “image”.
6. ***The Age of Show Business***: TV redefines public discourse and attacks literate culture, TV has made entertainment itself natural format to represent all experience. Technology = physical apparatus. Medium = use to which technology is put.
7. ***Now This***: Discontinuities, no order/meaning, fast media, not serious, can change channels or walk away. Credibility of teller is ultimate test of truth of proposition. Credibility = impression of sincerity/authenticity/attractiveness.
8. ***Shuffle Off to Bethlehem***: Televangelists – religion presented as entertainment, biases of TV determines type of message, focus on personalities
9. ***Reach Out and Elect Someone***: TV Ads – compact form of music, drama, imagery, humour, celebrity. Brevity, instant therapy, sound bites, vote more for personalities than parties, based on image.
10. ***Teaching as an Amusing Activity***: TV has power to control time, attention and cognitive habits of youth, controls their education. Different to classroom so forces classroom to become more ‘entertaining’ to compete with TV.
11. ***The Huxleyan***: Spirit of culture shriveled not by a ‘prison’ (e.g. 1984 by Orwell: thought control – destroyed by what we hate) but by ‘burlesque’ (e.g. Brave New World by Huxley : we are destroyed by what we love)

QUENTIN SCHULTZE “Habits of the High Tech Heart”

Excerpts of a Book Review by Futurist, Lane Jennings

"Today, we increasingly assume that doing things quickly and efficiently is more important than doing them carefully and ethically," states communications professor Quentin J. Schultze, summing up a major premise of his new book, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart*. Instead of continually craving "greater bandwidth" to send more messages faster, Schultze asks us to pay closer attention to what messages we send, and why.

Writing in the Puritan tradition of Protestant Christian social reformers, Schultze assails the arrogance and folly of humanity's repeated attempts to solve life's problems by relying on science and technology alone—without reference to any power greater than human will. In his view, the latest and most dangerous of these misguided efforts is the Internet. He puts it this way: "As cyberspace detaches information and messaging from moral responsibility, it becomes an open market with few overarching habits of the heart to leaven libertinism."

Without ever strictly defining what is moral, Schultze builds an elaborate case for setting voluntary limits to human desires and actions, based on the values enshrined in traditional beliefs. In particular, he sees "informationists" threatening six key social virtues or "habits of the heart" (a term used by Alexis de Tocqueville to describe a shared commitment to the common good): *discernment, moderation, wisdom, humility, authenticity, and diversity*.

In Schultze's view, infotech weakens our *discernment*—the power to distinguish between genuine and bogus—as we increasingly become amoral observers rather than intimate participants in events around us. When e-mail replaces live meetings, we save time, but lose the subtleties of voice and facial expression that help conversation partners judge the sincerity and intensity behind each other's words. Watching nightly TV news clips blurs differences between spontaneous actions and staged drama until people and events seem no more real to us than characters in a soap opera.

We lose our sense of *moderation* as we give in to "bandwidth envy," blindly trusting that more and faster communication must improve our lives, when too often it simply exposes us to more junk messages. Schultze compares the example of highway systems, where new and wider roads have often simply encouraged more people to drive, thus expanding traffic jams rather than relieving them.

Schultze is particularly alarmed by the decline in *wisdom* he perceives has resulted from society's increasing reliance on databases rather than human experience. Facts and statistics, he reminds us, are not the only forms of information humans use to make decisions. Computers may find it difficult to mimic human value judgments based on affection, appreciation of beauty, instinct, respect for tradition, or careful listening to someone else's opinions, but that does not make these low-tech skills less important for achieving satisfactory outcomes—particularly in complex non-zero-sum situations.

Humility—being able to laugh at ourselves, or at least see our personal concerns in some broader context—erodes when humans start to believe themselves infallible, Schultze warns. We make technology our religion, and, like the captain of the *Titanic*, stake our very lives on a blind faith that the systems we depend on most can never fail us. *Authenticity*—the simple ability to say what you mean and mean what you say—becomes hard to practice, and harder still to test, in a cyberworld where who you are depends entirely on whatever information you choose to present about yourself. Lastly, true *diversity*—appreciation for the character and achievements of other cultures—dies out in a world that increasingly rejects whatever is "technologically unproductive" (from mid-day siestas to slow and careful reading of printed texts).

He asks readers to acknowledge that neither individuals nor institutions can ever fully control nature through technology to serve human ends and to accept that it is better for everyone if we devote our lives to serving others instead of merely seeking to maximize our personal comfort and convenience.

Schultze's faith-based assumption that the desire to put pleasure ahead of duty is something humans should be ashamed of and suppress may not be shared by all his readers. But his warnings against blindly trusting technology, losing our grasp on reality, and endowing information with value while ignoring how it is used, all deserve to be heard. ...

Quentin J. Schultze may be a Puritan, but he cannot be dismissed as a mere Luddite unthinkingly opposed to any new technology. His book is filled with telling quotes and ideas from articulate spokesmen representing many points of view—such as this from Archbishop Charles J. Chaput: "We certainly want salvation ... but for many of us tools function as a pretty good insurance policy, just in case. ... We've learned to trust our own ingenuity because it works. Unfortunately, the construction crew at Babel felt the same."

REVIEW OF “THE HIDDEN POWER OF ELECTRONIC CULTURE” BY SHANE HIPPS

You wonder what you are in for when you read the blurb of this book. Eminent pastors and Christian authors all shout Hipps’ praise, but these commendations are all in the same vein: I wonder what would have happened had I *not* read this book. For church leadership, I would most certainly echo this sentiment. But as I hope to show in this short review, Hipps’ book is entirely relevant to any church-goer who honestly wants to make sense of the electro-maelstrom that is today’s technology. *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture* takes no prisoners and demands some radical ‘re-appraisals’ of worship that have and will continue to raise conjecture. The long and short of it is that anyone, regardless of their position in the church hierarchy, should be glad this book exists. As Hipps states, it is only when we *question* a medium that we affirm our power over *it*.

A quick caveat though. Hipps favours the Marshall McLuhan approach to cultural investigation and whilst this gives the book a good analytical framework, McLuhan’s own work should be subjected to critique. Without sugar-coating it, McLuhan’s work is an enormous can of worms in itself. However, this does not in any way affect the integrity or validity of the book’s content. Hipps has recognised controversy where it does exist and encourages further analysis of any grey area.

The most powerful section of the book, certainly for me, was Hipps’ passionate acknowledgment of Christians being God’s ‘chosen medium’. In summary, his chapter screams “No more cop outs!” Is humanity flawed? Yes. Does this mean the Church is flawed? Yes. But too often we witness that old excuse “If you want to know what Christianity is like, don’t look at us Christians. We’re as messed up as everybody else. Look at Jesus.” There is certainly truth in this statement, but it is fast becoming the *go-to line* whenever we are challenged with some kind of church-related hypocrisy.

There are several chapters dedicated to the re-definition of terms such as ‘medium’ and ‘message’, and it is in these that Hipps demonstrates how (through Christ) God’s medium and message are combined perfectly. What’s more, God found a way to ensure the divine presence of Christ would remain active on earth through the creation of a new medium: the church. Thus, the Church is defined quite nicely as the medium for God’s ongoing revelation to the world. Consequently, we are faced with profound implications if we define the church in this way—even more profound when you consider our current cultural context and interaction with today’s electrical vortex of technology.

Hipps speaks of us as ‘electric nomads’, individuals who are involved in the push-pull paradox of modern technology. More than ever before we are connecting to more people, more often over ever-increasing distances via our mobile phones, PDA’s and internet based social networking services. Yet for all this ‘connectivity’ can we truly say that we are part of an *authentic* community? Well, no. This is virtual community and something Hipps calls ‘the cotton candy quality relationship’. There is nothing wrong with it when used moderation, but it poses a definite problem when it becomes the *preferred form* of community. Authentic community can not survive with this kind of technology-facilitated ‘intimate anonymity’. Scripture calls us to authentic community, labeling it as an absolute necessity and powerful witness. Yes, the old adage comes into play here: familiarity breeds contempt, so we all need our space! The pull of the cotton candy community is huge as our current individualistic culture designates such conflicts as something to be avoided at all costs. A quote from Andy Crouch: “No one gets out of any serious experiment in human community—church, marriage, family or otherwise—without discovering and becoming an enemy.” Simply put, it will happen.

I certainly know what question I was asking after all the dust settled ... *Is there some method in the madness?* Why on earth would God choose such a frail and inconsistent medium to embody his abiding message, that being the church? I think it is fair to say it is logical that such a message of *redemption and reconciliation* would be better carried by bent and bruised hearts as living testament to God’s stunning power to reach through human sin, failure and sadness. It’s not a call to perfection, but a call to grow as in witness as God’s chosen medium.

STANDARDS FOR TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

(As espoused by Christian author and environmentalist, Wendell Berry,
<http://home.btconnect.com/tipiglen/berrynot.html>)

1. The new tool should be cheaper than the one it replaces.
2. It should be at least as small in scale as the one it replaces.
3. It should do work that is clearly and demonstrably better than the one it replaces.
4. It should use less energy than the one it replaces.
5. If possible, it should use some form of solar energy, such as that of the body.
6. It should be repairable by a person of ordinary intelligence, provided that he or she has the necessary tools.
7. It should be purchasable and repairable as near to home as possible.
8. It should come from a small, privately owned shop or store that will take it back for maintenance and repair.
9. It should not replace or disrupt anything good that already exists, and this includes family and community relationships.

For consideration:

How essential are the various technological devices you use most days: computer, internet, mobile phone, television, stereo, iPod, digital clock, etc.?

How would life change (both for better and worse) if you were to unplug for a week?

How might you eliminate, downsize, or temporarily unplug one or more devices to simplify life for a period of electronic fasting?



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