



session two theology of technology

THOUGHTFUL THEOLOGICAL USERS

We have established that we live in a digital world; and as loving pilgrims in a digital world, we must engage in technology as a thoughtful theological user. How might we begin this journey? First, we must understand why God has given us this gift and see how God has called us to use it to serve Him. Second, we must look at how our culture interacts with technology, how it affects our day-to-day life and well-being, noting its specific opportunities and challenges. Third, we must develop a practical guide to using technology in a way that capitalizes on its opportunities to serve God and safeguards us against its challenges. That will be the progression for the next sessions in our series. In this session, we will look specifically at technology's place in God's universe, understanding its original design as it pertains to our calling as human beings made in the image of God.

TECHNOLOGY & THE CREATION MANDATE

In the beginning, God created and ordered His universe to function and serve His purposes. Once the cosmos had been brought to order, God said that it was good. The concluding act of God's ordering of the universe concerned the creation of man, who was specially made in God's own image. The God who brought the universe into existence saw fit to extend His attributes to mankind. These attributes most certainly included humanity's essence as spiritual beings, consciousness, the capacity for moral freedom, etc., but it is also included humanity's ability to create. As people who were made in the image of God, we have the ability to create - to bring order and function out of disorder and chaos.



Human beings create because of a God-given ability to create. And the practical result of our creative activity is something we call *technology*.¹

Technology is the necessary overflow of our creative activity, and that creative activity is tied to who we are as God's image bearers in His world.

Moreover, as God's image-bearers, human beings were designed to represent God's rule and dominion over the earth. Observing Genesis 1:26-28, the image of God in man equipped them to exercise God's rule and dominion over the earth. In one sense, God was delegating His kingship over the earth to humans. With this, God gave mankind the creation mandate.



“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

GENESIS 1:28

How might we summarize this creation mandate? In short, God gave human beings the task of **cultural formation**. We fulfill this mandate as we develop the social world - i.e., 'be fruitful and multiply' - and as we harness the potential of the natural world - i.e., 'subdue the earth.'² We fulfill our the mandate of our existence as God's image bearers when we invest in family, build churches, schools, and cities, when we garden for food, design computers, or paint a canvas; and all of these endeavors require technology. So technology is not a modern invention; it is a necessary aspect of our life as human beings made in the image of God who create culture. With this perspective, Tim Challies provides a helpful definition of technology:

tech-nol-o-gy

the creative activity of using tools to shape
God's creation for practical purposes.

Therefore, as we develop of a theology of technology in light of Genesis 1, we can provide the following assertion: technology is a good gift from God that equips us to fulfill our basic function as human beings. Technology is means by which we accomplish the creation mandate and create a culture under God's lordship.



**Technology is a good gift from God that equips
us to fulfill our basic function as human beings.**

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TECHNOLOGY & THE FALL

It is not sufficient to simply observe technology in light of God's good design in creation, because we know that something in our world is broken. As we continue the biblical story in Genesis, we must take Genesis 3 into account. In human beings' desire to define right and wrong on their own terms apart from their relationship to God, they disobey God and bring about the curse. Just as every good gift was brought into corruption through the fall, technology is likewise subject to the curse. What was meant for good and for serving God's glory in this world was manipulated and corrupted by the perversion of man's sin. In a disappointing turn of events because of the fall, human beings now use technology to create a culture that rebels against God and undermines his lordship.



“Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.’”

GENESIS 11:4

So we also must realize that technology itself is not good or bad, but it is how we use that technology that determines its good or bad use in our life. Although technology is a good gift from God that equips human beings to fulfill their basic function as image bearers, the fall leads human beings to use technology against its original design. Therefore, technology is morally neutral, meaning that it is a means that can be employed for good purposes or bad purposes. Technology is used to expand medical resources to save lives, and technology is used to create nuclear bombs and kill lives. The difference is in how humans use technology, not whether or not they use technology.

Understanding technology in light of the biblical story leads us to make three important clarifications regarding technology:

1. Technology is a good gift from God.
2. Technology is subject to the curse.
3. Technology is morally neutral.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY & OUR CULTURE

Given this theology of technology, it is undeniable that technology plays an integral role in cultural formation. The condition of our culture is formed and shaped in large part by the technologies that we use in our everyday life. As Challies noted, “technological change is not additive but ecological.”³ He means that technology does not just change individuals, but it also changes the culture. So it would be naïve to think that our engagement with social media and use of digital technology is only affecting us; rather it has shaped and is shaping our culture in major ways. As all technology concerns the creative activity of cultural formation, we must realize that digital technology and social media has formed the culture in which we live.

It would be almost impossible to list and examine all of the ways in which digital technology has shaped our culture. However, there are some key cultural trends caused by digital technology, and they specifically pertain to our Christian life. The effects of digital technology in key cultural areas are not all negative, nor are they all positive, for we know that much of the value of technology’s application is determined by the human intent behind that application; but the cultural trends listed below are selected because of the major role they play in Christians growing as loving pilgrims in the world. In other words, if the church longs to form and shape a culture that represents God’s lordship, then it must be watchful and wise to these cultural tendencies generated by digital technology and social media.

1. **Distraction:** In the unwavering commitment to forsake boredom, we have become addicted to distraction, which most often takes the form of mindless entertainment.
2. **Identity:** Our identity is predominantly a mediated identity, where we have become digitally disincarnated, generating a false sense of control, and focusing on our digital caricature rather than our true character.
3. **Information:** We are constantly flooded with unlimited information and ideas, having lost the functionality of information, our ability to discern truth from fiction, and the ability to think through questions instead of simply locate answers.
4. **Sexuality:** Sex has become easy-everywhere, flooding our everyday lives with the temptation of lust, increasing addiction to pornography, and developing a wrong view of sex.
5. **Community:** We have become accustomed to gathering as networked individuals, which has weakened our view of true community and encouraged us to leave a community when it becomes difficult or opposed to personal immediate interests.

THE NEXT SESSIONS

These major cultural trends will be the focus for the next five sessions. In each session we will seek to demonstrate how digital technology and social media has played a role in generating the cultural trend as well as how Christians can wisely and practically engage in cultural formation that seeks to represent God's lordship on earth. Those practical elements of cultural formation will vary with each session, but there are two classifications of practical application that we will seek to provide in each session: **nudges** and **disciplines**.

In his book *The Tech-Wise Family*, Andy Crouch provides this helpful distinction between nudges and disciplines to assist the individual or family that is seeking to put digital technology in its "proper place" - i.e. to wisely and virtuously use technology in a way that forms a culture that represents God's lordship.⁴ He notes, "nudges are small changes in the environment around us that make it easier for us to make the choices we want to make or want others to make."⁵ In other words, nudges "make certain choices easier and more likely."⁶ For example, if someone were attempting to eat healthier, an example of a nudge would be throwing out all of the junk food in the house. Throwing out the junk food does not make the individual eat healthier, but it does make it easier to eat healthier. Nudges assist in our desire to do the right thing by combating our weakness and limited willpower in the process of going from "I want to want" to "I want."

The other classification of practical application concerns our disciplines. Unlike nudges, disciplines seek to not only modify the environment and make choices easier, but disciplines seek to develop our virtue - our inward resolve to make the right decision no matter how difficult it is. One may think of nudges as more external, outward assistance to make the right decision and disciplines are more of an internal force to make the right decision. As Crouch stated, disciplines seek "to develop the strength to make good choices even when everything around us is nudging, or pushing, us in the wrong direction."⁷ A pattern of discipline will develop into a habit that changes what we want into a powerful desire.

In order to live as loving pilgrims in God's world, fulfilling our mandate as God's image bearers to create a culture that represents his lordship, we must utilize nudges and disciplines to combat cultural trends generated by digital technology and social media. This requires a level of intentionality - a resolve, a choice - to do what is difficult in pursuing who God has designed for us to be and do what God has called us to do.

ENDNOTES

1. Tim Challies, *The Next Story: Faith, Friends, Family, and the Digital World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 22
2. See Nancy Pearcey's elucidation of the creation mandate in *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 47.
3. Challies, *The Next Story*, 40.
4. See Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 16-21.
5. Ibid., 33.
6. Ibid., 33.
7. Ibid., 35.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever thought about technology from a biblical perspective? If so, what were some of your thoughts before this session? How has your perspective changed?
2. How would you summarize the creation mandate in your own words?
3. Of the three biblical clarifications we made regarding technology - that it is a good gift from God, subject to the curse, and morally neutral - which one did you tend to overlook in your treatment of technology?
4. Of the five cultural tendencies of our digital world that we will explore in this series, which one strikes you as the most important and why?



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STUDENT RESPONSE

Would you describe yourself as a creative person? Why or why not?

What are some ways that you have utilized technology to create a culture that wrongly represents your lordship over your own life rather than God's lordship?

What are some practical ways you can rightly use technology to represent God's lordship in your life?

Of the five cultural tendencies of our digital age that we will address in this series, which one do you feel you struggle with the least? Which one do you struggle with the most?

What are some nudges and disciplines you already anticipate needing to implement in your life?

PRAYER

Take a moment to write out a prayer to God, praising him for his creation and design. Thank him that he has graciously sought to use you to build his kingdom. Seek wisdom for how you can better glorify him on earth and form a culture that represents his lordship.
