



FOLLOWING JESUS IN A DIGITAL AGE

Biblical Wisdom for Digital Culture

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Following Jesus in a Digital Age

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible study provides a guided process for individuals and small groups to explore how our digital age is shaping and forming us and to understand how to live as faithful Christians in a time where technology consumes more and more of our time. Six weeks of study examine different facets of following Jesus in a digital age:

1. TECHNOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

2. DISCIPLESHIP

3. IDENTITY

4. TRUTH

5. RELATIONSHIPS

6. WISDOM

Each week has a group study as well as three personal studies.

GROUP STUDY

Six group sessions are provided that are designed to spark gospel conversations around brief video teachings. Each group session is divided into four sections:

1. START focuses participants on the topic of the session's teaching.

2. WATCH provides space to take notes.

3. DISCUSS guides the group to examine and understand the video teaching and the week's topic.

4. PRAYER closes the group by connecting with God and thanking Him for what we've shared.

PERSONAL STUDY

One week of Bible study is devoted to each of these topics, and each week is divided into three sections of personal study. In these sections you'll find biblical teaching and interactive questions that will help you understand and apply the teaching.

1. LEARN connects the week's topic to the text of the Bible and guides us to rethink how we engage with technology.

2. INFLUENCE asks us to evaluate the areas in life where we have or exert influence and challenges us to make the most of those opportunities.

3. PRACTICE gives us practical handles to interact wisely with the technology and devices around us.

LEADER GUIDE

If you're leading a group through this content, there is a guide in the back to help you lead the group portion of the study.



Week 1

TECHNOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

» START

Use this section to get the conversation going.

■ **Share one piece of technology that you would say is integral to your life.**

Some of us never think about our technology habits until we have a problem we can't seem to fix or something isn't working the way it's supposed to work. And as technology has become integrated into every aspect of our lives, many are starting to question what role these tools should play and what they may be doing to us given how we are constantly connected to our smartphones and devices.

■ **Why do you think many Christians don't consider how their faith informs the technology they use or don't use?**

One of the biggest temptations in the digital age for Christians is to think that our faith doesn't address the pressing questions of technology we face today. Since we can't find smartphones, algorithms, or social media in the back of our Bible, we might mistakenly believe that the Bible doesn't offer us any wisdom about how to interact with ideas and devices that weren't invented when the Bible was written.

One of the biggest reasons we often fail to see how the Bible addresses technology is that we focus on technology as simply a tool we use rather than seeing the distinct ways technology is shaping us that are often contrary to our faith. So at the beginning of our time together we're going to ask and answer some questions to get us on the same page and set the course for the rest of our study.

» **WATCH**

Use this space to take notes during the video.

» DISCUSS

I. WHAT IS TECHNOLOGY?

■ How would you define technology?

Trying to define technology can seem like a tall order, but at the same time something so simple that we just assume we know the answer. We tend to think of technology as simply the internet, our smartphones, various gadgets, or even social media. But if you take a minute to think about those answers, you'll realize that those are simply forms of digital technology and that humanity has always had some form of technology—whether it be a shovel, medicine, or the printing press. Technology has been with us from the very beginning. A better way to define technology is to say that:

*Technology is a tool, but one that is shaping us
in distinct ways as part of a larger culture.*

■ What are some “distinct ways” technology is shaping you?

2. IS TECHNOLOGY GOOD, BAD, OR NEUTRAL?

- **Take a moment to list out four different forms of technology and try to decide if they are essentially good, bad, or morally neutral. Once you've listed them compare your answers with the group.**

You likely weren't able to come to a consensus on these labels because of how complex technology really is. The same tool can be used in ways that are God-honoring and in ways that are dangerous. Technology is not really good, bad, or neutral, but it is deeply shaping us—including how we see God, ourselves, and the world around us.

3. HOW MIGHT TECHNOLOGY BE SHAPING YOU IN BOTH GODLY AND UNGODLY WAYS?

- **What is a way technology is shaping you to be more like Christ?**

What is a way that technology is shaping you in ungodly ways?

Throughout this study we'll be considering this question in more detail. Technology is a tool but one that is shaping us in distinct ways (week 2). It is altering how we perceive our identity as human beings in relation to God and our neighbors (week 3), how we perceive what is true and good (week 4), and even how we communicate with one another (week 5). How is it possible that the same tool can affect people in such drastically different ways? And how do we go about cultivating wisdom for the digital age (week 6)?

4. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT TECHNOLOGY?

- **What are some stories or passages of Scripture that shed light on the power of technology to form or shape how we perceive the world?**

List some passages where humanity used our creative and tool-making gifts to make a name for ourselves rather than worship God.

5. HOW HAS GOD CALLED HIS PEOPLE TO LIVE IN LIGHT OF THE GIFTS HE HAS GIVEN US?

- Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7 and Matthew 22:37-39.

What do these passages teach us about how to use the technological and creative gifts God has given us?

PRAYER

Lord, You are the creator of everything and You are in control of everything, including the technologies we make and use. We ask that You give us wisdom in thinking about technology and how we can use it in ways that honor You. Help us to see that technology is shaping us in ways often contrary to our faith and help us to consider Your glory above our own interests when navigating the wild world of technology today. In Jesus's name, amen.

Personal Study 1

LEARN

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT TECHNOLOGY?

In the group session, we briefly introduced and began to answer the question: What does the Bible teach about technology? Yet as we begin to answer, we also recognize that for many of us, even though we believe the Bible teaches us what to believe and how to act, we believe it doesn't offer much guidance about many of the questions we face today like those related to technology.

- **What questions do you have about the Bible and technology that you hope to see answered in this study?**

We saw that the Bible teaches us that technology is a tool, but one that is shaping us in distinct ways. Let's try and develop this idea and see what God's Word says about the nature of technology and how it is shaping us.

While there is not a letter from the apostle Paul or a warning from one of the prophets about social media, smartphones, or artificial intelligence, Scripture offers principles and practices that should characterize the Christian life no matter the challenges we face. Many of these principles apply to the way Christians should think about and engage with the gift of technology. Let's turn to Exodus 31–32—a text that reminds us of God's good gifts and how we often abuse them to build ourselves up rather than honor God:

The LORD also spoke to Moses: "Look, I have appointed by name Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with God's Spirit, with wisdom, understanding, and ability in every craft to design artistic works in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut gemstones for mounting, and to carve wood for work in every craft. I have also selected Oholiab

son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to be with him. I have put wisdom in the heart of every skilled artisan in order to make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, the ark of the testimony, the mercy seat that is on top of it, and all the other furnishings of the tent—the table with its utensils, the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, the basin with its stand—the specially woven garments, both the holy garments for the priest Aaron and the garments for his sons to serve as priests, the anointing oil, and the fragrant incense for the sanctuary. They must make them according to all that I have commanded you.”

EXODUS 31:1-11

- **What gifts from God did you notice in this passage? How are these creative gifts related to our use of technology?**

Exodus tells us that the Lord filled a man (Bezalel) with God's spirit, wisdom, understanding, and ability in every craft to design and create things for God's glory and for the good of the people. Those abilities were good and were given to all the craftsmen of the day to create what God had commanded them. God used these gifts to build different articles and elements for a place of worship where He would be able to dwell in Israel—the tabernacle.

WHY DID GOD GIVE THESE GIFTS TO MEN?

When God commands us to do something, it is for our benefit that we do it. God knows what is good for us because He created us and cares deeply for us, including the things we use our God-given skills and talents to make. God delights when we use our gifts to bring Him glory. But if you know the story, you know that these abilities and tools were misused and abused by a sinful people.

Look at Exodus 32:1-10:

When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make gods for us who will go before us because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!"

Aaron replied to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me." So all the people took off the gold rings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from them, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into an image of a calf.

Then they said, "Israel, these are your gods, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!"

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of it and made an announcement: "There will be a festival to the LORD tomorrow." Early the next morning they arose, offered burnt offerings, and presented fellowship offerings. The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to party.

The LORD spoke to Moses: "Go down at once! For your people you brought up from the land of Egypt have acted corruptly. They have quickly turned from the way I commanded them; they have made for themselves an image of a calf. They have bowed down to it, sacrificed to it, and said, 'Israel, these are your gods, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.'"

The LORD also said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and they are indeed a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone, so that my anger can burn against them and I can destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

EXODUS 32:1-10

- **How were the gifts given in this passage used for sinful purposes?**

Almost immediately, God's people went from hearing His instructions about creating a place of worship to using their gifts to create a false image of worship. They sought to make a name for themselves similar to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11) rather than honoring God. As a result, the Lord's anger burned against them because they had used the gifts He gave them to worship Him in order to worship other gods. Ultimately, they put themselves in the place of God by disobeying His commands. The tools and abilities they were given for righteous purposes were used instead to rebel against God and His desire to dwell among His people.

- **Review your answers from the previous two questions. What can you learn about how to use the gifts of technology from these passages?**

Based on these stories, how might Christians connect to God's intent to how we use our technologies and talents to love God and others?

While some may see the Bible as an ancient document that is unconcerned with contemporary questions of technology, it is clear that the gift to envision and create technology comes from God. He has given us gifts and has instilled in us the ability to create these tools, but we routinely use these gifts to honor ourselves rather than to honor and worship Him.

Our creative gifts along with our sinful heart can be a recipe for disaster unless we take the time to slow down and ask the hard questions about what technology is and how it is shaping us. We need God's help.

In Exodus 32:10, despite the corruption of Israel and their worship of idols, God promised them that He would make Israel into a great nation. While our technologies and tools may disciple us in ways that take emphasis off God and put it on ourselves, God's plan for us and our technology is never thwarted. God's plan is not only good but is unchangeable.

Personal Study 2

INFLUENCE

THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE GOOD OF OTHERS

In our digital age, it is increasingly evident that we are easily distracted and inclined to use our God-given gifts such as technology in ways that don't bring glory to God. While this might seem like a new problem, the previous personal study demonstrated that it is an age-old problem. If that's the case, how does the Bible instruct us to use our gifts and talents—and even our technology—to love God?

The Great Commandment is the perfect place for instruction because here Jesus sums up the entirety of how Christians are called to live in light of God's truths.

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they came together. And one of them, an expert in the law, asked a question to test him: "Teacher, which command in the law is the greatest?"

He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

MATTHEW 22:34-40

Jesus summarized the entirety of the Christian life—loving God and loving others. Notice how Jesus's command directs us outside of ourselves. Instead of focusing on what we might want or making it all about us, He points to others.

Think about all the different areas of life you're actively involved in. Take me for example: I am a husband and a father to two boys, a son, a brother, a church member, an ethicist and instructor at a Christian college, and a writer! In each of these areas of life, I have duties and responsibilities to other people. God has placed me in these contexts and calls me to live above reproach and walk in wisdom as I seek to love him and love those around me (Ephesians 5:15; 1 Peter 2:9).

Given how technology has been incorporated into nearly every area of our lives, from our personal life to our families, our work, and even our churches, we must think wisely and biblically about how these tools are shaping and forming us. We'll dive deeper into this concept of how technology is discipling us in the next session, but we should note here the various areas of life where God is calling us to follow Him by loving Him and our neighbor. The command to love God and love our neighbor extends to every area of our lives, include how we use the technologies that God has given us.

Technology is something that we incorporate into the different areas of our lives to make things run simply and more efficiently. That's one of the main goals of technology—by design it is intended to make things easier and more streamlined. It can obviously make our lives easier and more convenient but we must not forget its true purpose and power.

As we think about the spheres of influence we find ourselves in, let's start in the middle and work our way out.

■ **First, how might you use technology as an individual to love God with you whole heart? Soul? Mind?**

Second, how might you use technology to love you spouse, family, or roommates better?

Third, how might you use technology to love your neighbors and your church better?

Every one of us has benefited from some sort of technology, and that should be no surprise. God gave us the ability to create these tools; He intended for us to have them. The point of this study is to help all of us think wisely about how we use these innovative tools so that we use them to love God and our neighbor well.

Personal Study 3

PRACTICE

IDENTIFYING HABITS

We know that in most things, breaking bad habits takes a while and is not easy, because habits form over time. Without realizing it, you've likely developed various habits with technology that radically alter how you interact with the world around you.

What is your morning routine like? I imagine that you likely have a very similar routine to me. Each morning, I instinctively reach for my phone the moment I wake up, usually by my alarm (or more often lately by our two sons who have recently become early risers). For some reason, I always expect to see a host of notifications, including little red badges on various apps telling me everything I supposedly missed between last night's final check and this morning's scroll. But there is nothing of note outside a few email newsletters, which are often news-related, to start the day and an increasingly long to-do list that I never seem to get caught up on. Almost without thinking before getting out of bed, I make my rounds through various apps on my phone. I check my email, my social media feeds, and various work tools, to see what I might have missed overnight. I do all of this without even realizing that apart from my overseas friends, most of the folks I know have been sleeping. But something seems to push me to check all of these things before I even put my feet on the floor.

This constant push to check our devices and apps is one of the countless ways technology is shaping and forming us. There are some important questions to ask ourselves when trying to address how to better use technology for good purposes.

These questions easily apply to any technology. But for the sake of today's exercise, identify one piece of technology you use and consider the answers to these questions.

■ Why do you use this particular form of technology?

Are you using these tools primarily to love God and love others or to make a name for yourself? This can be one of the most eye-opening questions.

In what contexts and at what times are you drawn to your devices or social media? Is there a pattern that emerges?

Is it hard for you to go long periods of time without your devices or social media? If so, why?

How is your technology use negatively influencing other habits or affecting your relationships with your spouse, roommate, kids, small group, pastor, or neighbors?

If we can answer these questions truthfully and honestly, then we have a good foundation for thinking about new ways to use different technology in our lives and how we can redeem our time while using it. In the next session, we will explore more about how technology is discipling us and shaping how we see others and the world around us.