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Genesis 4:19-22

Ockenga Fellows Reflection: Technology and the Bible

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During this pandemic, more than any other time in my life, we have depended on technology to remain connected, employed, and on the go. You may be experiencing or are currently experiencing “**Zoom fatigue**.” Zoom fatigue is when you get done with a day of work and you’re completely **drained** from all those **online meetings** and **interactions**. This happens because it takes more energy to have a meeting over Zoom. You have to focus or you might get **lost** in the conversation. Typically, the **screen** is right in front of you, which means you’re chatting with one or even a room full of people, right in front of your **face**. There’s **nowhere to hide** and it can leave you feeling **tired** and **anxious**. Welcome to all the church people watching us on **Facebook Live**! I hope we don’t **wear you out**!

While many of us feel **grateful** for how technology has kept us **connected**, it has come at a **cost**, hasn’t it? Zoom isn’t the only place we feel the cost. Technology is **everywhere**, not just digital technology, but this **lectern**, our **church carpet** and **chairs**, the **clothing** we are wearing. Kevin Vanhoozer **defines technology**, “Technology includes all tools, machines, utensils, weapons, instruments, housing, clothing, communicating and transporting devices and the skills by which we produce and use them.”¹ We all use technology whether we’re using **Zoom** or a **toothbrush** and it all comes at a **cost**. Today I want us to **count the cost**. I’m not trying to tell us to throw out our **iPhones**, but hopefully, to think a little more critically about our use of technology. I **love** technology, but that means I need to **question it** all the more.

The Bible does **not specifically address** our use of smart phones or computers but it can help us understand our use of technology better. Today I want to give us a **Biblical overview** of what the Bible has to say about technology. We don’t have the time to examine this topic through a **microscope**. Our journey will be more like a **satellite image**. Let’s start at beginning of the Bible, **Genesis**.

God made us to be creative beings.

In the first chapter of the Bible we find God fashioning and creating the earth and heavens. As he gets to the end of this creation God makes man and woman in his image, which means they’re also **creative like him**. He then calls them to rule over all of creation.

Genesis 1:27-28 (NIV)

27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

God makes men and women in his image, which gives them **value** and **authority**, and then he calls them together to “rule over” all of creation (Gen 1:26-27). The Hebrew root of the word “subdue” (**kabash**), means to **subjugate something**, which means to bring it under our **dominion** or **control**. We’re to to

steward creation.² The root of subdue is the same for “**footstool**” (**kebesh**) or “**kiln**” (**kibshan**). There’s the **inherent idea** that to **subdue (steward) well** will require **tools** and **technology**.

1. We can use technology to express creativity and beauty.

If we were to **leap forward** in the story of the Bible to the **Israelites** as they come out of **Egypt**, it is clear that during their **400 years** of **captivity** they picked up **skills** and the **use of tools**. Just like “**Moses** was **educated** in all the **wisdom** of the **Egyptians**” (Acts 7:22) it seems like some of their **laborers** were too.

Exodus 31:1-5 (NIV)

Then the Lord said to Moses, 2 “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, 3 and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— 4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, 5 to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts.

Here we find Bezalel using **tools** to create the tabernacle and all its **beautiful vessels**. God made him to be a **creative person**, and technology helps him use the gifts God has given him. Their skills please God and he uses them to build a place to worship him. *We can use technology to express creativity and beauty.*

Great Big Story profiled a 77-year old Japanese artist who wanted to start **painting in retirement**. Instead of using the **type of technology** we might think of, **paint** and **paint brushes**, he turned on **Microsoft Excel**. He has made incredible works of art and even won awards, all in Excel. Maybe you’re not going paint with excel but you could sit down and write an **encouraging letter** to a **friend** with **pen** and **paper** or make a **dress** out of **duct tape** for **prom** or make a **meal** with **cookware** in an **oven**, **all technology**. *We can use technology to express creativity and beauty.*

2. We can use technology to do good work.

When God called us to be fruitful, multiply and subdue the earth, he was calling us to **make good work**. Work is a **pre-fall mandate**, which means **work is inherently good, not a result of sin** (John 5:17). The **disciples** are **fisherman** who used the technology of **fishing boats, oars, and nets** (John 21:6). **Jesus** was a **carpenter**, which is like the **car-mechanic** of the ancient world (Mark 6:3).³ God himself gave us us his word through the technology of **written communication** in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.⁴ We can actually use technology to **glorify God** if we use it with **well** and with a **humble heart** (Prov 22:29).

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV)

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

We can use technology to do good work. My brother bought me a **LifeStraw personal water filter** as a gift. If you’re not familiar with LifeStraw, neither was I, but it’s a tube like filter that you can place directly into a river or water source and you can drink through it. It kills something like 99.999999% of bacteria (E. coli, etc.) and 99.999% of protozoa (Giardia, etc.). They say, “For every Lifestraw filter you purchase, a child around the world will be provided with safe drinking water for an entire school year.” Lifestraw has given over three million students access to safe water. *We can use technology to do good work.*

As Christians, we understand that our creativity and use of technology reflects a God who is himself creative. The cost of technology doesn’t sound so bad, right? But we also need to look at some **risks** of technology.

Technology can be used for good or for evil.

The story doesn't end in Genesis chapter one. Adam and Eve disobey God and God drives them out of the garden. But what does he do before he drives them out?

Genesis 3:21 (NIV) The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

God is the **first inventor** of technology when he makes “garments of skin.” We know God's use is only good. Some think that God's sacrifice of an animal to clothe Adam and Eve **foreshadows** the coming **sacrificial system** in the Old Testament and God's own sacrifice of his **Son** to **clothe us** with **forgiveness** and **grace**. God uses technology for good and so we too can use it for good, but often we don't.

After Adam and Eve's son **Cain** kills his brother **Abel**, God drives him out. He has children and grandchildren. One of his **descendants** is an **evil** man named **Lamech**. He is so bad he **marries multiple women** and **boasts** about **killing a young man**, declaring he'll be worse than Cain (Gen 4:23-24). Well, Lamech had **two sons** who **invented** the **farming**, the **arts**, and **sciences**.

Genesis 4:19-22 (NIV)

19 Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. 20 Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. 21 His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. 22 Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

This **hints** that technology, even instruments and tools, might be **problematic**.⁵ At the Ockenga fellows program, our leaders challenged us with the idea that “**Technology is not neutral**.” By its very use, it will have either a good or bad consequence, or even both in different ways. There is always a cost to technology, even if it benefits us one way, there may be a downside as well.

1. Technology often has unintended consequences.

For example, **bronze** is used in the Old Testament to make **vessels** for the **tabernacle** (Exod 27:19). It's also used to make a bronze **serpent** to **miraculously cure** anyone who looks at it when they're **bitten** by snakes in the **wilderness** (Num 21:9). However, the people eventually turn this bronze serpent into an **idol** of **worship** (2 Kings 18:4). That's what happens with technology, **at first it's helpful and great**, but then we spend more and more time with it, **bowing our heads** to our **screens in worship**.

As part of our Ockenga retreat we read the book *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* by **Neil Postman**. He is someone who wrote about its dangers back in 1993 before it was cool. One of our cohort leaders said he would write his books **critiquing technology** entirely on **pen** and **paper**. He writes about the origin of the clock, a piece of technology we probably all take for granted, and how the clock was invented for one purpose but had **unintended consequences**.

The **clock** had its origin in the **Benedictine monasteries** of the **twelfth** and **thirteenth centuries**. The impetus behind the invention was to provide a more or less precise regularity to the **routines** of the **monasteries**, which required, among other things, seven periods of devotion during the course of the day. The **bells** of the monastery were to be rung to signal the **canonical hours**; the **mechanical clock** was the technology that could provide **precision** to these **rituals** of **devotion**. And indeed it did. But what the monks **did not foresee** was that the clock is a means not merely of keeping track of the hours but also of **synchronizing** and **controlling** the **actions** of **men**. And thus, by the middle of the **fourteenth century**, the clock had moved outside the walls of the monastery, and brought a **new** and **precise regularity** to the life of the **workman** and the **merchant**. “The mechanical clock,” as Lewis Mumford wrote, “made possible the idea of **regular production**, regular **working hours** and a **standardized product**.” In short, without the clock, **capitalism** would have been quite

impossible. The **paradox**, the **surprise**, and the **wonder** are that the clock was invented by men who wanted to **devote themselves more rigorously to God**; it ended as the **technology of greatest use to men who wished to devote themselves to the accumulation of money.**⁶

Postman writes technology produces “**ecological**” change. It changes our **environment**, how we work and act in our **homes** and **workplaces**. Technology doesn’t just change how we do things, it **changes our world**, how we live and breathe and operate. *Technology often has unintended consequences.*

2. Technology can cause us to rely on ourselves instead of God.

The **Tower of Babel** is a story of people using technology to **disobey God**. God originally called people to “**fill the earth**” but instead they **congregate together** to build a **city** and **tower** to **become like God**. Notice how **brick-technology** helps them **rely on themselves instead of God**.

Genesis 11:3-4 (NIV)

3 They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

They use their technology, bricks and tar, although not wrong in themselves, to commit idolatry, to worship themselves instead of God. Babel is actually the **first “Babylon”** which is the **ancient city that opposes God**. Babylon appears all throughout the Bible, using whatever it can to make its name great. The Apostle John has a vision of “Babylon the Great” as an adulterous woman (Rev 17:5).

Revelation 17:4 (NIV) The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.

Babylon uses **technology**, a **cup**. She is the **original archetype** of all who stand against God. We live in **Babylon today**, the **kingdom of the world ruled by man**. As Christians we need to be careful not to be **seduced** by the **power** and **attraction** of **technology**. Technology can be used for **good**, sure, but it’s also one of the ways our **culture** (our **Babylon**) teaches us to *rely on ourselves instead of God*. This leads to a **break** in our **relationship** with God, the **highest cost**.

3. How we use technology is an overflow of our hearts.

Proverbs tells us that the way we use technology shows what’s really in our heart.

Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.

If I use technology to try and **satisfy** my **greed** or my **lust** or my **need for other’s approval**, technology has **revealed** what is **inside me**, **cultivating** the **insecurities** and **doubts**. As we see pictures of others **excelling at life** we **question our own**. Before we can have the right perspective on technology, we need **God** to come and **deal with our hearts**. **God** cares about us and our **world** enough to rescue us.

John 3:16 (NIV) For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

God loves the world! That means he loves the things we **create** and **do** and most of all **loves us** enough to send his **Son** to rescue us. Jesus did this by paying the ultimate price. He was **nailed** to a **cross** and placed in a **tomb**, the **technology of death**, so that **you and I might live**. But he defeated sin and death when he **rose to life** three days later. Now as we **repent** and **believe** in him he gives us **eternal life**, taking our sins and giving us **resurrection** in its place. God can **redeem you**, no matter how **broken** or **addicted** we are to **technology**, no matter how strong our **heart craves it**. **Jesus can change our hearts**.

God will ultimately redeem technology.

The Bible **begins** in a **garden** and **ends** in a **city**. Our story begins in a place with **no-technology** and ends in a place **filled** with technology. Revelation hints that the **nations** will bring the very best of their **art, sciences, and culture** into the eternal city called the **New Jerusalem**.

Revelation 21:24 (NIV) The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

We will bring our “**splendor**” into the New Jerusalem. We will bring **the best** of what we have **created** into the New Jerusalem. I think that will **somehow include technology**. No longer will we use technology and creativity for **greed** or to **amass power**, but for the **good of our neighbor** and the **glory of God**.

So **this time tomorrow** when you turn on your **Zoom conference call** and you’re feeling that “Zoom fatigue,” take a moment and ask the Lord to use this technology, in some small way, to **further his kingdom**. Maybe that means asking someone **how their day is going** or **cutting the meeting short** so that others can **have a break**. Maybe it means Zooming a **family member** or **friend** to check in on them. No I’m not being **paid to promote Zoom**, but I do believe *God can redeem technology for his purposes*.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight. (NIV)

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. How do you use technology in your home? Where is it?
2. What are some of unintended costs of technologies in your home?
3. Where do you see technology benefit or help others?
4. Where do you see technology hurt or disadvantage others?
5. How might you use the technology you have for good?
6. What surprised you about what the Bible has to say about technology?
7. How does technology help us see our need for a Savior?

¹ Vanhoozer, Kevin J.. *The Pastor as Public Theologian*. Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

² “As I will mention later, it is important to note that many have interpreted “dominion” in a way that gives sanction to ravaging or neglecting the created order, and in some cases this language has been associated with some of the worst expressions of political conquest. This is why understanding “dominion,” or “rule,” as steward-like care is essential. We can think of it this way: we would only regard a ruler positively if they lead their kingdom to flourishing, if they are good stewards of the domain under their care.” Bacote, Vincent E.. *The Political Disciple (Ordinary Theology)* (p. 33). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

³ David J. Hansen. *The Art of Pastoring: Ministry Without All the Answers* (Kindle Location 1611). Kindle Edition.

⁴ Jesse Wisnewski, *Technology in the Bible: A Short Guide to Bible Verses About Technology*, Published September 17, 2018.
<https://get.tithe.ly/blog/technology-in-the-bible>

⁵ Thank you Dr. Sean McDonough for your Ockenga Fellows Healthcare & Technology lecture in March 2019.

⁶ Postman, Neil. *Technopoly*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.