



How to Thrive in a Digital World

First in a 3-part mini-series titled: *Trending*
Part of the larger 10-week *Family Bundle* series

Pastor Matt Friend – September 30 & October 3, 2021
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– OUTLINE –

Today's Big Idea:

Technology is a gift from God when used within the guardrails of grace.

What guardrails can we set up to help our families and ourselves thrive in this digital world?

Guardrail #1 –

Lead your family to use technology to love and remember God, not to forget God.

Guardrail #2 –

Lead your family to use technology to love and connect with others, not to isolate yourself from others.

Guardrail #3 –

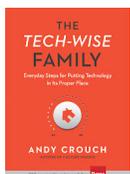
Lead your family to use technology to build character and virtue, not to trigger temptation or activate anxiety.

Guardrail #4 –

Lead your family to use technology to flourish in all aspects of life, not to waste what you have.

Guardrail #5 –

Show grace to other families who might choose to use technology differently than you do, avoiding guilt and shame.



Resource Recommendation

[*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#)

By Andy Crouch

Glorifying God by producing more maturing followers of Jesus



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– NOTES –

Introduction:

Please open your Bible or Bible app to Titus 2:11-15. I'll be teaching from the NIV.

Today we continue our 10-week “Family Bundle” series. We're bundling family discipleship in a way we all can use.

The word *family* is potentially misleading because it can refer to a number of different entities. Those of us in North America have a view of family different that someone from the Ivory Coast, for instance, or from rural Japan. Only recently, and in our corner of the world, has *family* has primarily referred a father, a mother, and their biological children living together in a single-family home. That was my upbringing and how I'm raising my kids.

However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, this description fits less than 20% of U.S. households. For much of the world, *family* refers to grandmas & grandpas, uncles & aunts, and cousins—often living under the same roof. Many in our own community care for grandparents/kids in their homes. Some are single moms or single dads. Many households are double-income-no-kids or single men and women of all ages living alone, either by choice or as the result of being widowed.

Today's message, *How to Thrive in a Digital World*, applies to all of us in all kinds of families. I've prayed that God will give you ears to hear, and that you've come with an expectant heart and an empty cup ready to receive truth from God's word.

“The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you” (Titus 2:11-15 NIV).



Today's Big Idea:

Technology is a gift from God when used within the guardrails of grace.

Big Idea (Expanded):

Not a day goes by that we don't use some form of technology. Technology's influence on our lives stretches back thousands of years to the use of shovels and spears. Whether it's as simple as a chair or as complex as the systems proposed with brain-computer interfaces, technology is all around. In the last decade or two, we have seen exponential growth in technological innovation. This has led to many asking fundamental questions about how we use technology and what kind of influence it has on our lives. Does the Bible really address these questions?

While a quick search in a concordance doesn't yield words like "technology," "artificial intelligence," or "smartphones," Scripture does speak to how we are to live in this world in light of the message of salvation found in Christ Jesus. Technology has always posed difficult ethical and moral issues that are not directly addressed by Scripture. And as much as we want it to, the Bible does not explicitly address how to use or when to avoid certain pieces of technology. However, it does address the moral behavior of Christians in everyday life. The biblical approach to technology is not one of complete withdrawal nor unquestionable embrace.

In the opening chapters of Genesis, we read about how God created the entire world and called it good. On the sixth day, he created man and then pronounced creation "very good." When God created humanity in his image, he established that work is good. In Genesis 2:15, he placed Adam in the garden "to work and keep it." He gave Adam and Eve the ability to create and cultivate, to take dominion, differentiating them from the rest of creation.

In the very beginning, God saw everything he had made and called it very good. (Genesis 1:31). Part of that goodness is the human capacity to discover and develop all the potential in God's amazing cosmos. It may have taken thousands of years for us to understand how electricity and magnetism work together, to learn how to efficiently harness the earth's massive reserves of energy, and to discover the properties of materials at tiny scales—but all that was there from the very beginning, waiting to be discovered. God said it was good.



In Genesis 4:2, we see very early in human history that God gave us the technology to till the soil, and by verse 22 of Genesis 4, he gave us the knowledge to make musical instruments.

In Exodus 31:1-11, for example, God described the wisdom and understanding he had given to skilled Israelite workers in order to construct the tent of meeting so that his people could come into his presence. Unfortunately, just a chapter later, we see what happens when these skills were applied for evil. The golden calf was built for the Israelites' worship, revealing their hidden idolatries and lack of faith in God. The skills were the same, but the product was different.

Those who go to Israel with us next year will get to see Hezekiah's famous tunnel, sometimes called the Siloam Tunnel.

- How do you get water into your mountain city without having to go outside the city walls? If you're King Hezekiah of Judah in the late 8th and early 7th century B.C., you dig a tunnel through solid rock from the nearby Gihon spring to one of the lowest points in your city, the Pool of Siloam.
- This water channel corresponds to the waterworks mentioned in 2 Kings 20:20 and 2 Chronicles 32.
- The curving tunnel is 583 yards long and by using the 12-inch altitude difference between its two ends, which corresponds to a 0.06 % gradient, the engineers managed to convey the water from the spring to the pool.
- According to the Siloam inscription, the tunnel was excavated by two teams, one starting at each end of the tunnel and then meeting in the middle.
- How the Israelite engineers dealt with the difficult feat of making two teams digging from opposite ends meet (within inches) far underground is still not fully understood. Sound signals? Complex geometry? Several theories have merit.

The list of helpful technology in the Bible could go on and on... from Noah's ark to the boat from which Jesus often taught on the Sea of Galilee.

I like the way Freeman Dyson says it, "Technology is a gift of God. After the gift of life it is perhaps the greatest of God's gifts. It is the mother of civilizations, of arts and of sciences."

Technology can be a very good thing; however, it must be used within specific guardrails.



What guardrails can we set up to help our families and ourselves thrive in this digital world?

Guardrail #1 –

Lead your family to use technology to love and remember God, not to forget God.

Technology can be used to help us draw near to God. For instance:

- Many of us love to listen to Christian music.
- Some of you write music.
- Many of our shut-ins are able to watch our services on TV or online.
- Some of us enjoy reading and listening to the Bible on our phones.

However, may we never allow technology to become a distraction from loving God.

Remember Hezekiah's water tunnel I mentioned a moment ago? Unfortunately, God references that same tunnel as an example of how the people had become infatuated with technology, but had forgotten God: "You saw the City of David, that it was great. You gathered together the waters of the lower pool. You also made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you did not look to its Maker, nor did you have respect for Him who fashioned it long ago" (Isaiah 22:11).

In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul warns us, "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything.

If any aspect of technology distracts you from loving God, set up a guardrail immediately.

Guardrail #2 –

Lead your family to use technology to love and connect with others, not to isolate yourself from others.

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be



filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:3-9).

Technology can help us love and connect with others in many ways. For example, a grandmother may get to Skype or FaceTime or Zoom with her grandchildren on the other side of the country. Social media is another way that enables us to stay connected with family and friends.

However, using social media as an example, it’s important that we remember Jesus’ words above. Here are a few questions you can ask yourself:

- Do I only use your social media to make myself look good, or do I ever use it to brag on others?
- Do I only share my happy days or do I ever open up about my difficult days?
- Am I known for responding gently or aggressively?
- Do I exude emotional and mental control on social media, or does my feed reveal an unstable person in need of help?
- Does my social media promote righteousness as Jesus defines it?
- Do I give grace to others on social media or do I use it as a tool to bring shame and guilt to others who disagree with me?
- Am I known for being a peacemaker or a pot-stirrer?
- Do I reflect Christ or am I known for being a jerk?

As for technology in the home, it’s is a gift from God when it unites your family, not when it divides your family. Technology is in its proper place when it helps us bond with the real people we have been given to love. It’s out of its proper place when we end up bonding with people at a distance, like celebrities, whom we will never meet. Technology is in its proper place when it starts great conversations. It’s out of its proper place when it prevents us from talking with and listening to one another.

A few practical suggestions:

- If you’re gonna watch TV, try watching something together.
- Video chat with extended family members who live far away.
- Have family game nights and take turns choosing the game.
- Send positive affirming text messages to your family in a group chat.
- Help your kids find apps that might resonate with something they are



already passionate about.

- Designate a bowl or basket to put devices in to avoid using them during certain times, such as at the dinner table.
- Treat going to a restaurant as a special occasion for the family to enjoy time together.
- Compete for your kids' and grandkids' attention! This is harder, but more effective than making a rule.

Guardrail #3 –

Lead your family to use technology to build character and virtue, not to trigger temptation or activate anxiety.

Character and virtue are outgrowths of the gospel. This includes the fruit of the Spirit and all the virtues mentioned in the Bible, from cover to cover.

Though the following generalizations aren't mutually exclusive, men and boys typically struggle with digital temptations regarding the lust of the eyes. Women and girls typically struggle with digital temptations regarding comparison, jealousy, and anxiety. Our phones learn our temptations—what we watch, scroll to, stop for—and it all gets added to our digital algorithm.

Let's use TikTok as an example.

Recently the Wall Street Journal ran an article called, "How TikTok Serves up Sex and Drug Videos to Minors." They set up 30 or so fake underage TikTok accounts. TikTok served one account registered as a 13-year-old at least 569 videos about drug use, references to cocaine and meth. TikTok exposed this same 13-year-old over 100 videos from accounts recommending paid pornography sites and sex shops. This doesn't include the videos of eating disorders, glorified alcohol experiences like drinking games.

It is estimated that pornography accounts for 30 percent of all internet traffic. It makes sex look easy. It objectifies the human body. An astonishing 62 percent of teenagers say they have received a nude image on their phone, and 40 percent say that have sent one.

The effect of social media on young women is staggering. It is leading to exaggerated anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. These girls are seeing images of chiseled bodies, perfect abs, and women doing 100 burpees in ten



minutes. In a world where young women already feel badly about their bodies, Instagram and Snapchat aren't helping. In most cases, they are making them exponentially worse.

“If you believe that R. J. Reynolds should have been more truthful about the link between smoking and lung cancer, then you should probably believe that Facebook should be more upfront about links to depression among teen girls.”
– Dr. Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University

Even for those of us adults who are news-a-holics, consider Alan Shlemon's article titled, “How 2020 is Taking a Toll on Your Soul.” He writes, “Could it be that God didn't wire us to carry every event, taking place in every part of the world, at every moment, as if it were ours? Could it be that technology has produced a fake omniscience and omnipresence that is hurting mankind and not helping it? Through the internet and social media, technology has given us ringside seats to every event, tragedy, and evil act that happens in any part of the planet. That's not something we're created to handle. Up until the last fraction of human existence, we've only had to carry events that directly affect us, our family/friends, and our local community. Today, with the internet and social media, we can witness every evil event. If we miss it, a recording is readily replayed online. The carnage is funneled through our eyes and embedded in our soul. What we witness can be in the next town, the next state, or on the other side of the planet. No matter where it happens, we see it. It's like we're everywhere.”

Guardrail #4 –

Lead your family to use technology to flourish in all aspects of life, not to waste what you have.

First, let's define flourishing. “Flourishing” is so much more than temporal happiness. In botany (dendrology), it refers to “rapidly growing and thriving trees.” In psychology, it refers to “a state where people experience positive emotions, psychological and social functioning, most of the time. In the Bible, it refers to “overall shalom; wholeness; to be at peace with one's self, with others, and with God” (Psalm 1; 2:12; 33:12; Proverbs 3:13; 14:21; 29:18). In life, it plays a part in physical, intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual, financial, sexual, occupational, environmental, and family wellness.

In many ways, a flourishing life is a “balanced” life. There's no place where one part of a person's life is fighting against another part of his or her life. It's a life in harmony with self, with others, and with God.



The greatest influence in our digital world is a flourishing follower of Jesus.

Ask yourself the following:

- In what ways am I using technology to help me flourish physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, financially, and so forth?
- In what ways could I use technology more effectively to help me flourish in these areas?
- In what ways do I need to immediately change how I'm using technology to prevent any further damage to me in these areas?

Guardrail #5 –

Show grace to other families who might choose to use technology differently than you do, avoiding guilt and shame.

All of us will apply this message differently, to ourselves and to our families. The proper place for technology won't be exactly the same for every family, and it is not the same at every season of our lives. There's not a one-size-fits-all formula for every family. This will require discernment and discussion for each family.

It's important that we remember that the emphasis of the New Testament is our union with Christ and our unity with one another—brothers and sisters within the Church. Let's keep the following in mind...

“Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions” (Proverbs 18:2).

“Accept the one whose faith is weak, **without quarreling** over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything **must not treat with contempt** the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything **must not judge** the one who does, for God has accepted them.

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.



Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord.

So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. **You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.**

It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.' So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

Therefore, **let us stop passing judgment on one another.** Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.

Therefore, do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. **For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,** because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval" (Romans 14:1-18).

Why must we set up these guardrails? Because...

Technology is a gift from God when used within the guardrails of grace.