

May 2023

Dear Friends,

Spring has finally come to Colorado. Last evening, Stasi and I took a lovely after-dinner walk through the neighborhood. The sun is setting later each day, and it was one of those wonderful evenings where the deer were out and browsing, a few crickets were beginning to wake up, and the hummingbirds were whizzing by busy with their spring work. A soft, warm breeze carried the aromas of earth and newly awakened foliage.

It was healing.

Only fifteen minutes into the walk, we turned to each other and said, “This is so much better than screens. So much more restoring than technology.”

You see, winter stays long here in Colorado. We live at 7000 feet, and spring comes very late; April is one of our biggest snow months. While the azaleas are blooming in Atlanta and the dogwoods in Portland, we are shoveling our driveways one more time. Over months and months of short days and long nights in winter, our evenings are often spent in front of screens. Reading online articles, answering email, or watching something. It’s just not the same.

The reason most people love summer so much—as we do—is that LIFE returns. It’s barefoot-in-the-grass time! The green, lush world beckons you to your garden, the beach, flowing rivers, your back deck. In summer we are able to live so much more as human beings were meant to live. Not all hunkered down in a cabin against the dark cold winter, but out and about—cycling, gardening, swimming, hiking, or just lingering on the patio with friends.

It usually takes a vacation (or simply the first evening walk of the year) to make clear the startling difference between how life-giving nature is and how life-draining technology is. And so my fatherly counsel to you this month is to make the absolute most of the late spring and early summer. Get off screens and get outside! Let your full humanity come forth in God’s full creation.

Friends, one of the great myths of the modern era is the myth that technology is neutral.

It is not.

When anxiety and depression rise in exact correlation to the amount of time you spend on social media (there’s loads of research on this), when we know the internet is eroding our attention span (plenty of research on that too), that screen and cell phone usage is rewiring our brains (proof there also), you wonder why everyone isn’t cutting back on every form of screen time. You’d think we’d have these things locked up till absolutely necessary.

But denial is a powerful thing.

So is addiction. (Technology is addictive; plenty of data on that as well.)

Suddenly, we have AI (artificial intelligence) upon us. It is upping the stakes at a dizzying pace. Snapchat now has an embedded chatbot; young people and children can choose to “talk” with an AI companion when their friends aren’t online...or even when they are. This is not good, folks. I recently watched a disturbing video demonstrating an actual interaction with AI in Snapchat helping an “anonymous” 13-year-old girl be groomed for sexual harm

by a fictitious 31-year-old man. The chatbot just helped the process right along. To watch that report and get a eye-opening education on AI, get on YouTube and look this up:

“The AI Dilemma – March 9, 2023” by The Center for Humane Technology

It is a talk given by experts *within* the AI community addressing their own peers in Silicon Valley about the dangers of what’s happening with AI. When you are finished watching it, remind yourself, “Jesus is still Lord.” Don’t freak out. “Do not be alarmed,” was how Jesus himself put it (Matthew 24:6). But yes—let’s be smart.

Technology is not neutral. It is something we have to exercise strong dominion over, especially in our domestic “kingdoms.” (For one thing, I would not allow your children to form a “relationship” with an AI “friend,” in Snapchat or elsewhere.)

A simple act of ruling my kingdom and domain involves a regular practice of consecrating all my technology and cleansing it with the blood of Christ. Something like this...

*I bring all computers, tablets, cell phones, apps, television, and cable in our home under the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. I cleanse all technology in this house with the blood of Christ, including all internet, wifi, cellular signals, all cable and media. I command the blood of Christ and the Glory of God to filter all media, signals, and internet coming into our home, including through our cell phones. In the name of the Lord Jesus.*

Christians are called to operate with an awareness that our enemy is always looking for “open doors” and opportunities to access our domain to do his dark work. Just watch a horror movie and try to have a good night’s sleep. And so the aware Christian is vigilant not to allow open doors in their domain. (I remember one neighbor saying to me years ago, when video games took over their household through their teenage boys, “I feel like I let Satan in the house.” Given the dark nature of some of those games and the sudden violence between previously harmonious children, she probably did.)

Set an example for your family and friends by choosing the real world over the artificial every time you can. Like an evening walk over screen time. Help your kids fall more in love with nature—and all the adventures you can have there—than they love their technology. This isn’t just for the sake of your mental and physical health.

We do this to win the battle for our *soul*.

Sent in love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.

John

P.S. I know, I know—the debate over AI is going to get very loud, very soon. We’ll be back with some more thoughts on upcoming podcasts.