Bob Snyder and Rob Stewart, "Technology and Temptation"
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Introduction: Technology and the Internet
Tools are neutral, but some tools reshape a social environment (Industrial Revolution / Information Revolution).
Each technological revolution brings with it its own temptations (omnipotence / omniscience)—to play iGod.
Question: *How should we respond to this change in our social environment, especially in parenting our children?*
Given our influence in training (Lk. 6:40), we must start with ourselves, before we address our youth.

Part I: Technology and Temptation for Adults

The New Social Environment
Main Features: **Access** and **Abundance**—specifically, *easy access* to *endless abundance* [access to excess].
Abundance: Internet – "data overload" through Google, Amazon, Social Networking (e.g. Instagram, X).
Access: Smartphone – *mobiquity* that correlates with a dramatic change in social behavior (2011)
Main Temptations: **Worldliness** (self-indulgence) and **Laziness** (immaturity/underdevelopment).

1. **Worldliness**: Self-Indulgence (lust)
   Heightened Personalization – *It's about me!*—personalized shopping to being the news story.
   Heightened Polarization – *It's about us!*—we only link to "friends" and listen to voices of our position.
   Warning: We are expressly commanded not to be worldly (Rom. 12:2; Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17 – all three!).
   Common Sins: Envy, Discontentment (we stir up lust), Gossip, and Rudeness (loss of "netiquette").
   "Godliness [we can be *like* God] with contentment [we cannot *be* God] is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6).
   Solution to Worldliness: *What should we do with our abundance?*
   First – Understand the *nature* of abundance—having more than you need.
   Second – Understand the *dangers* of abundance—although a blessing, *keeping* it is unwise and sinful:
   Danger of Abundance: ***Apostasy*** (1 Tim. 6:9-10; cf. Dt. 32 – Jeshurun; Hos. 13:6; Cotton Mather).
   Danger of Abundance: ***Preoccupation*** (Mt. 6:19-21 – loss of security and focus; cf. Pr. 20, Agur).
   Negatively, we must not accumulate things on earth (Dt. 17; Mt. 6; Col. 3:5; Lk. 12:15, 33).
   Positively, we must learn to be content (Ph. 4:11ff; Heb. 13:5-6; cf. 1 Tim. 6:6-8).
   Third – Understand the *purpose* of abundance—sharing, directly or selling/giving (Lk. 3:11; 2 Cor. 8).
   This process will require contentment, discernment in pruning, and wise character (Jas. 3:17).

2. **Laziness:** Immaturity/underdevelopment—a *leisure* society becomes a *lazy* society—what are the dangers?
   Danger of Laziness: **Immorality**
   Boredom is the effect of making life all about me → perverted pleasures (Ezek. 16:49-50; Kirk).
   Danger of Laziness: **Immaturity** (underdevelopment)
   Easy access to abundant *knowledge* hides our need of *discernment* and results in loss of *wisdom*.
   Why teach math? Why not "Google" it? Or listen to an expert? Or text rather than plan to meet?
   Not all information is *good* information nor *equal* (cf. publishing vs. self-publishing/posting).
   Solution to Laziness: *What should we do with our access?*
   First – Understand the *need* for discernment—just because I can does not mean that I should (Rob).
   Asking if a movie, app, or game is bad is the lowest question—does it edify and glorify God?
   Taking digital pictures *appears* free, but costs us *time*—we click and decide later.
   Scanning notes off the board serves the goal of storage, but delays learning through digestion.
   Deciding on asking itself seems unnecessary because it takes less time to just get the answer.
   Technology can lead to knowing less—e.g. math, languages, how to memorize or read a map.
   Yet again, easy access to abundance inundates our minds and a lack of pruning makes it unfruitful.
   Second – Understand the *work* of discernment—no shortcut for practice (Heb. 5:14 – cf. art, sport).
   Learners must receive, treasure, hear, cry out, seek, search, and meditate (Pr. 2; Ps.1).
   Gaining wisdom is a process—the Word and experience teach it (Pr. 29:15).
   One more article or podcast is no substitute for obedience (illus. Getz, business man).
   Some things cannot be made "faster and easier" (e.g. hothouse growth is faster, but less resilient):
   Parenting: Discipline, training, teaching, playing with children, reading to children,
   Relationships: communication, listening, touching, observing, even intuiting what is thought.

Application: "Questions to consider with one another" (see below).

Part II: Technology and Temptation for Youth

Review
>Easy access and endless abundance tempt us to worldliness—especially the lust of the eyes—and to laziness.
>In response we need contentment and discernment, without which we will never attain to wisdom.

Application: *Three Ways*
1. Control the access – no smartphone, password-protected, left behind, on table at night (not in a bedroom).
2. Control the abundance – limited minutes, blocked channels, turn it into a dumbphone (i.e. not on Internet)
3. Control ourselves – do our physical work, homework, conversations, or prayer without checking our phone
   >Illus. **Snack culture**—not just portable but repackaged as smaller—*instant* to *constant* gratification.
   >How many of us can resist the urge to press the pleasure button *right here?* (Huxley). Think: *Cookies!*

Self-Control – *Temptation is intensified with access and abundance.*
>In a world of access and abundance, would you trust yourself? Your young people? And now anonymous!
>Practical Tips for learning self-control:
>>Pray for this fruit of the Spirit—then cultivate a love and delight in Christ (Ps. 37:4; Jer. 2:13).
>>Self-control is ultimately wanting Christ-control, so think on Him and be transformed (2 Cor. 3:18; 5:14).
>>Have a public plan – not a private plan. Have a phone station for your family phones.
>>Have time limits/shut-off for your family. Fast as a family from social media/technology—everyone.
>>Don't get drugged up in the first place when you try to start with technology.
>>Don't be fooled by "mini-sized" bites of the wrong things.
>>Don't be fooled into saying "tools are neutral." These tools are trying to trap you!

Hyperconnected and Distracted
>Being *connected* represents community, but the constant *expectation* of connection feels like we are not free.
>Danger: Hyper-connectivity leads to distraction—always *available*, rarely *present* (Detweiler).

Hyper-connectivity has **personal** and **relational** effects:
1. **Personal Effect:** *Constant Interruptions*
   >Two Myths: Brain Development (lack of exercise) and Multitasking (Perman, "switch-tasking").
   >Effect: Constant interruptions give a sense of crisis—creating anxiety (avg. teen checks phone 80+/day).
2. **Relational Effect:** *Constant Distractions* – we are now both busy (apart) and then fragmented (together)!
   >**First** – It keeps us from being "**all there**" (Jim Elliot), which is *rude*—and love is not rude (1 Cor. 13:5).
   >**Second** – It can keep a teen from developing apart from his or her **parents**.
   >>Maturing requires freedom—freedom to make choices and to fail (Garden of Eden).
   >>Instead of "helicopter parenting" or a timed "need" to check in, youth need to *leave father and mother*.
   >>>With virtual reality, *can* we ever truly *leave*, unless boundaries are set up or access is limited?
   >>Healthy independence is dependence on God with voluntary access to parents and other counselors.
   >**Third** – It can hinder a healthy relationship with **God**:
   >>If our smartphone is what we turn to first for guidance or delight, then our *gadget* is our *God*!
   >>Prayer takes concentration (1 Pt. 4:7, McIntyre); so, leave the crowd (Lk. 5:16), even if wanted (4:42).
   >>>Let people know, "Please do not interpret my lack of connectivity as being *dead* or *not caring*!"
   >>>Some advocate a "media fast" or "electronic Sabbath" in order to connect with God!

iGen Characteristics
>We raised this generation; therefore, we need to reference ourselves in this evaluation—this is *our* situation.
>Trait #1 – **Individualism**
>>In 2016, young voters overwhelmingly voted for either Sanders or Trump, seen as political independents.
>Trait #2 – **Safety**
>>Teens today smoke less, drink less, date less, have sex less, drive less, hang out less—except with parents.
>>Why? Safety—not just physical, but emotional—relationships are threatening to feelings and identity.
>>Even though smoking marijuana is considered safe, they accept it more than they smoke it.
>>**Problem:** *Safety is defined as avoiding danger.* Note the similarity with individualism:
>>>**Freedom** is the *absence of rules*—rather than *empowerment* through discipline to attain new heights.
>>>**Safety** is the *absence of danger*—rather than *resilience* gained through increasingly risky acts of duty.
>>>>No, safety is found in growing up (Heb. "be a man")—wisdom protect our youth (Pr. 2).
>>**Question:** No *spanking*? If "hitting" is unsafe, not spanking is too (Pr. 13:24; 19:18; 23:13-14).
>>*What is your definition of safe?* Over-protection has produced a self-centered, home-bodied generation.

Trait #3 – **Immaturity**

This generation is growing up slowly—adolescence is no longer lengthened (as in GenX), it is delayed.
Teens are less likely to date, to hang out, to drive, or to go out at all without their parents (Twenge 19).
Among the non-college-educated: Fully one-fourth of men in their 20s did not work at all in 2016.
Recent Study: College students scored higher on "maturity fears" (45)— "adulting" vs. named as "kids".
Disinvitations and safe spaces on campus show that more and more expect college to feel safe like home.
Instead of overlooking offenses and arguing with someone who disagrees, they expect administrators to act.
Ironically, extending childhood into years of early manhood is definitely not safe in the end—for any of us!

What if we went to war? Green Berets should have *twelve* per unit, but lack of able men means *eight*!
Finding young people able to get up and get to work regularly is hard, what if these men faced war?

Question: *If young people are not dating, working, or going out, then what are they doing?*
Ans.   They are on their phone. Nearly all undergraduates slept with their phones or within arm's reach.
The phone is the last thing checked (often watching videos before bed) and first thing grabbed (the alarm).
Irony: On a phone, but not talking—instead *texting*, *social media*, *online*, *gaming* ("new media").

Question: *How much time is spent on the smartphone?*
Facts: In 2015, "iGen seniors spent an average of 2¼ hours per day texting, 2 hours per day on the Internet,
1½ hours a day gaming,…about a ½ hour on video chat…six hours a day…just during their leisure time."
If girls are on social media, the boys are on video games, but the statistics have a *bimodal distribution*:
Some teens hardly at all (27% less than an hr/wk), but others a lot (9% 40+ hrs/wk):
E.g. only social activity for one 16-year-old ("big gamer"), another did Xbox with others until 3 a.m.
To *play all day*—golf, basketball, casinos, video games, or "adult" coloring books—is *childish* (1 Cor. 13:11).
This does not even mention the persistent problem of near universal viewing of porn among young men.
Again, our easy access to endless abundance has led our nation of leisure to worldliness and laziness.

Thoughts on Gaming (Pastor Aaron Darlington)

Time – Make the most of it (Eph. 5:15-16).
Social Association – Many video games are highly social without accountability (Pr. 13:20; 1 Cor. 15:33).
Access to Evil – Many video games have communication components with exposure to anyone and anything.
Imitation of Good – We were created for work and accomplishment—gaming mimics these, but without fruit.

The Role of Social Conditions in Sanctification

The New Testament shows a relationship between social conditions and moral behavior (1 Tim. 5:11-15):
Younger widows were not on the "list" due to the desire to marry and *learning* idleness and gossip.
Do you see a familiar pattern?
Young women without responsibilities "learn" idleness and indecent communication (e.g. noodz).
We should encourage marriage; even then, young moms are tempted by phones—and train kids (Lk. 6:40).

Virtual vs. Real: The Search for Happiness

To be "happy" may be *the* value of our culture, but happiness does not come from living for self (Acts 20:35).
Teens are more *not happy*. We have a crisis—loneliness, depression, suicide (UK ministry, Japanese rooms).
"There's not a single exception: all screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all nonscreen
activities are linked to more happiness. If you were going to give advice for a happy life based on this
graph, it would be straightforward: put down the phone, turn off the computer or iPad, and do something—
anything—that does not involve a screen" (Twenge 77-78).

Question: *Does the screen time cause unhappiness or do unhappy teens spend more time online?*
Studies suggest a causality: e.g. teens on social media do not feel more included, but feel lonelier and left out.
Highest risk for young teens: developing identities, body image issues, and online cyberbullying.

Question: *How much time is too much time?*
Statistics show: "Risks start to increase with…two hours or more a day and go up from there…"
Teens with "more than three hours a day…are 35% more like to have at least one suicide risk factor."
Girls are more at risk than boys. In 2015, 1/5 of girls experienced a major depressive episode.

Question: *Why might smartphones cause depression?* Twenge speculates:
Not getting an immediate reply to your text or social media causes anxiety—and girls may overanalyze.
Emphasis on perfect selfies has amplified body image issues for girls—like putting a mask on every day.
Girl drama is heightened and non-stop but without the context of facial expressions and gestures:
"The perennial teen girl question 'Is she mad at me?' is much harder to answer on a smartphone."

Problem: *Youth still yearn for in-person interaction, but they have less social skill now to do so—and less practice.*

    High-school seniors spend less time at parties—often these parties are adult-run—e.g. birthday parties.

        Why do they party less? One teen explained that teens in the past were bored, but now there is Netflix!

    Teens who get together with friends every day has been cut in half in just fifteen years.

    "Time spent with friends in person has been replaced by time spent with friends (and virtual friends) online."

        Note: Interacting with a *local* friend online is not the same thing as interacting with a *virtual* friend.

            Is the profile accurate? Do words represent character? How can we see the fruit at a distance?

            In one sense, virtual friends are *always* anonymous (e.g. Virginia grad student, India man).

Sum: Activity-by-activity is less: going to the mall, on dates, driving around for fun, movie, bars—you name it.

"There is one activity that iGen'ers do more than their predecessors: they spend more leisure time alone" (Twenge).

Biblical Assessment: *The medium is the message* (Marshall McLuhan; cf. Neil Postman – the 2nd commandment).

The medium both controls what can be said and has a message on its own (e.g. a suicidal man fired through a text).

    "Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink;

    but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made full" (2 Jn. 12; cf. 3 Jn. 13-14).

Virtual is not a real presence—you cannot be hugged, kissed, held, or even feel the virtual presence of another.

    Infants without physical affection die (Dobson, *New Dare to Discipline*, p. 49 – initially called "marasmus").

    When a loved one dies, we crave a friend's presence more than their words (e.g. old friend's funeral hug).

    The NT has many references to physical touch: e.g. "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (1 Cor. 16:20).

    We are embodied beings, not just minds and imaginations—God became "flesh" and we will be resurrected.

Ministry Challenge

As a church, we have a ministry challenge on our hands:

    A generation of loners who are timid and think we are scary (judgmental).

    They will be increasingly awkward and lonely—perhaps clingy—but desperately needy.

    We have a great opportunity—but like all Christian ministry, it comes with a cost of time and social capital.

        In faith and love, are we willing to bear that cost?

After three years of research, Twenge concludes:

    "I've realized this: iGen'ers are scared, maybe even terrified. Growing up slowly, raised to value safety, and frightened by the implications of income inequality, they have come to adolescence in a time when their primary social activity is staring at a small rectangular screen that can like them or reject them. The devices they hold in their hands have both extended their childhoods and isolated them from true human interaction. As a result, they are both the physically safest generation and the most mentally fragile…" (312).

Application: "Guarding Hearts" (see below).

Sources

Detweiler, Craig. *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2013.

Twenge, Jean M. *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*. New York: Atria Books, 2017.

Application for Part I: Technology and Temptation for Adults

Questions for us to consider with one another. It is not enough to ask these of ourselves alone. We should embrace working through these together as a church, as families and as friends. How we answer these questions may help us learn the impact that the digital age has impacted.

1. Is our family driven by Biblical principles in areas of technology? Or, are we just going where the digital world is taking us? Are we letting culture dictate our standards and preferences? (This would be true of any area of culture. We must apply it to technology now.) (Romans 12:1-2).

2. Am I being honest about my own tendencies to sin with technology? (Jeremiah 17:9; Prov. 16:2)

3. Am I going against my own conscience in the use of technology? Am I doing what I know I should not? Do I feel bad in how I use my computer, smart phone, gaming system? (Romans 14)

4. Does technology stir up sinful feelings in me? (lust, anger, jealousy, impatience, hate, revenge, pride)

5. Do I downplay to others my use of technology in any area? (time spent, viewing choices, etc.) (Col. 3:9)

6. Am I a slave to any technology? Would I willingly give up any truly unhelpful use of "technology"? (social media, 24-hour news channels, YouTube, games, etc.) (1 Cor. 9:27)

7. Would I welcome true accountability in my life to monitor my use of technology? (2 Tim. 2:22; Gal. 6:1-2)

8. Do I neglect those closest to me because of the use of technology?

9. Do you feel bad when you can't be on social media? Do you lose sleep over the use of technology?

10. Have people close to you asked you to change your habits and you can't or won't? Do your habits hurt other people (spouse, children)?

11. Is technology a source of escape or you? (pain, depression, sadness, boredom)

12. How often do you discuss as a family/couple/with friends the healthy parameters of technology? (Deut. 6:4-6)

13. Am I happier when I get online affirmation? (likes for my comments, posts, pictures)

14. Do I go media/technology before I go to God? (check email, texts, Facebook, news, etc.)

15. Do I go to media/technology to avoid responsibility?

Application for Part II: Technology and Temptation for Youth

Guarding Hearts
    "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Pr. 4:23, NIV).
    "My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways" (Pr. 23:26).

Parents: What you want to be their life? What do you want to flow from their heart?
Youth: What kind of man and woman do you want to be? Do you want to ignore your family for your devices?
    Do you want to be looking at porn when you are 35? Do you want to be unable to concentrate?
    This is no joke. What we feed ourselves with will shape who we are. You can't beat the system.
    You won't just become a different person when you are 22.

Parents, do you remember what it was like to be a teenager? Do you remember your temptations?
Can you imagine what it would be like have the access and abundance that exists for teenagers and children?
    To just tell them "don't do this or that" is not only ineffective, it is isolating and frustrating.
Out of the heart of your child will flow their life—who they are, what kind of person they are.
While your children are under your care, you are the primarily influence of what impacts their heart through:
    their peer group, available information and media, where you go as a family, what you bring into your home.

Youth: You can take responsibility for your life. You don't need to be afraid to ask for help and boundaries.
    This is a sign of maturity, not weakness. It can be better than what it is.
    If your parents don't give you boundaries, ask for them. If the boundaries are not working, ask for better ones.
    I know this may seem impossible. If you do not ask for help, there are reasons:
        You like what you do *or* you don't want to humble yourself *or* you think you can stop it on your own.

I'm not talking about isolating them from the fallenness of the world, but protecting them from evil in the world.
Understand the difference between *Ignorance* vs. *Innocence*:
    I don't want ignorant children. Ignorance of the world has the potential for harm, just as indulgence.
    I do want innocent children. I want them to be wise as serpents, but innocent as doves (Mt. 10:16).
Guarding hearts does not mean pulling them out of the world; but it does mean protecting them from predators.
There are people behind the internet paid to keep you clicking, watching and buying their product.
They want the hearts of people to fall in love with what they have to offer:
    porn, "friends", affirmation, wordily treasure, games . . . empty things.
I want my children to fall in love with the Lord.

Proverbs 5 ~ Consider the richness of this conversation between a father and his son about the adulterous woman.
The conversation is deeply real (not vague and abstract) because the temptation is genuine.
Someone (something) is after their heart and you have been given the responsibility to protect them:
    There is something out there worth striving for—wisdom (1-2).
    Temptation/Sin is going to taste good—you will like it (3)—but sin leads to death, bitterness, lostness (4).
    Pay attention to me (7) and do not even go near the temptation (8-9):
        This aim is not *ignorance* of her existence, but *innocence* of knowing too much about her.
        We don't let our children peek in the windows of those who want to steal their souls.
    You will suffer because of these sins (11), you will regret them (12), and you will be ashamed (14).
    Talk about the wonderful graces of Jesus (15). The gifts of Jesus: sex, joy, the good gifts of God, blessings.
        There are good things from God that are worth protecting.
    Don't forget God: He sees you (22). In Christ, He loves you. He is for His children.

Youth: It is my job to warn you as your pastor; your parent warn you as your parents; but you must listen and act.

Parents: Most of you need to be a lot more ***proactive*** (don't assume that what you are doing is enough), ***honest*** with your own temptations (if you need help yourself with the temptations of technology), and ***open*** (your children will listen if you talk with them—be the expert for your child).

Youth: Most of you need to be more ***honest*** (you need help with your use of technology), ***humble*** (you can't handle it and you are not wiser than your parents or the really smart people trying to get you hooked on their app), and ***hopeful*** (things can be different).