

Parenting and Technology

Helping People in the Digital Age

Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. in May 2021

@ Emmanuel Baptist Church, Raleigh

Lesson 4:

Developing Wisdom and Character along with our use of Technology (Josh Scally)

Wednesday, May 26

From a Ringing Bell to a Safety Protocol

As I shared in Lesson One, the alarm is being sounded by many concerned voices (Christian and non-Christian) that screen technology in particular has serious unintended consequences, especially among children and youth. In Lesson One, I observed ten consequences of our technological age (read Lesson One for details):

Technology's Downside

#1. The Tyranny of the Urgent

#2. Desensitization

#3. Image Replaces Proposition

#4. Dilution of Intimacy

#5. Brain Drain, Overstimulation

#6. “Chronological Snobbery”

#7. The Entertainment of All Things

#8. The Elimination of Shades and See-Through Blinds

#9. Diminishment of Observation & Reflection

#10. The Illusion—and Allurement—of Anonymity

These ten downsides are significant, but technology can still have a wise, positive use. Thus, in tonight's final lesson, I wish to move from observing the sounding alarm towards developing healthy habits undergirded by true wisdom.

FROM, *THE TECH-WISE FAMILY*, BY ANDY CROUCH
(GRAND RAPIDS: BAKER, 2017).

Ten Tech-Wise Commitments

-  1 We develop wisdom and courage together as a family.
-  2 We want to create more than we consume. So we fill the center of our home with things that reward skill and active engagement.
-  3 We are designed for a rhythm of work and rest. So one hour a day, one day a week, and one week a year, we turn off our devices and worship, feast, play, and rest together.
-  4 We wake up before our devices do, and they “go to bed” before we do.
-  5 We aim for “no screens before double digits” at school and at home.
-  6 We use screens for a purpose, and we use them together, rather than using them aimlessly and alone.
-  7 Car time is conversation time.
-  8 Spouses have one another’s passwords, and parents have total access to children’s devices.
-  9 We learn to sing together, rather than letting recorded and amplified music take over our lives and worship.
-  10 We show up in person for the big events of life. We learn how to be human by being fully present at our moments of greatest vulnerability. We hope to die in one another’s arms.

The Purpose of Technology & The Principles Governing the Use of Technology

At the end of Lesson One, I left us with some foundational questions:

Some Foundational Considerations: What questions will form our use of technology?

- Why do we exist?
- What is “the good life”?
- What is worth living for, what is true success?
- What are dangers to living well?
- What hope is there to live well?

We can and must learn from those with expertise in technological fields (as we did in Lesson One). Ultimately, however, we must foundationally know why we exist and what would make life well-lived so that we can accurately grasp what purpose inventions like technology can properly have.

Andy Crouch provides a helpful example of how a Christian looks to God’s Word for purpose and principles to wisely use technology.

Tech-Wise Commitments: A Combination of Purpose and Principle to Inform Life’s Habits

Andy Crouch’s Ten Tech-Wise Commitments depend on underlying purposes and principles. I will show you the Scripture behind these Tech-Wise Commitments and share some of Crouch’s insightful thought on each commitment.

#1. We develop wisdom and courage together as a family.

Number 1 flows from the biblical teaching that wisdom and courage are virtues and that a family unit should work together.

Proverbs 2:1–10

*2 My son, if you receive my words
and treasure up my commandments with you,
 ² making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
 ³ yes, if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
 ⁴ if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
 ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the Lord*

and find the knowledge of God.

*⁶ For the Lord gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;*

*⁷ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,*

*⁸ guarding the paths of justice
and watching over the way of his saints.*

*⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path;*

*¹⁰ for wisdom will come into your heart,
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;*

Proverbs 4:1–9

*4 Hear, O sons, a father's instruction,
and be attentive, that you may gain insight,*

*² for I give you good precepts;
do not forsake my teaching.*

*³ When I was a son with my father,
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,*

*⁴ he taught me and said to me,
“Let your heart hold fast my words;
keep my commandments, and live.*

*⁵ Get wisdom; get insight;
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.*

*⁶ Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.*

*⁷ The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever you get, get insight.*

*⁸ Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;
she will honor you if you embrace her.*

*⁹ She will place on your head a graceful garland;
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.”*

Crouch writes:

Family is about the forming of *persons*. ...

Two great things happen in families—at least, families at their best. For one, we discover what fools we are. No matter how big your house, it's not big enough to hide your foolishness from people who live with you day after day. We misunderstand each other, we misunderstand ourselves, and we certainly misunderstand God (when we remember him at all). In our families we see the consequences of all that misunderstanding. Our busyness, our laziness, our sullenness, our short tempers, our avoidance of conflict, our boiling-over conflicts—living in a family is one long education in just how foolish we can be, children and adults alike.

And yet a second amazing thing happens in families at their best. Our foolishness is seen and forgiven, and it is also seen and loved. As the British writer G. K. Chesterton put it in his book *Charles Dickens*, this is the secret of “ordinary and happy marriage”:

A man and a woman cannot live together without having against each other a kind of everlasting joke. Each has discovered that the other is a fool, but a great fool. This largeness, this grossness and gorgeousness of folly is the thing which we all find about those with whom we are in intimate contact; and it is the one enduring basis of affection, and even of respect.

He adds:

How can we become the kind of people who have wisdom and courage?

The only way to do it is *with other people*. We need people who know us and the complexities and difficulties of our lives really well—so well that we can’t hide the complexity and difficulty from them. And we need people who love us—who are unreservedly and unconditionally committed to us, our flourishing, and our growth no matter what we do, and who are so committed to us that they won’t let us stay the way we are.

If you don’t have people in your life who know you and love you in that radical way, it is very, very unlikely you will develop either wisdom or courage. You may become smart, you might even become successful, but it is very unlikely you will have a deep enough understanding of yourself and your complex calling to actually become either wise or courageous. We just are too good at deceiving ourselves and think too highly of ourselves. The people who know us best see the truth about who we are, even as they also see more clearly who we could become. . . .

As a Christian, I actually don’t believe the biological family is the main place we are meant to be known and loved in a way that leads to wisdom and courage. Jesus, after all, said some pretty harsh things about ordinary, biological family. He said that his way of wisdom and courage would divide children from parents and brothers from sisters—as it did in his day and sometimes still does in ours. When his own biological relatives came to one house where he was teaching and healing, trying to convince him to come home and stop being so messianic, he looked around and said, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? . . . Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt. 12:48–50).

The first family for everyone who wants wisdom and courage in the way of Jesus is the church—the community of disciples who are looking to Jesus to reshape their understanding and their character. And the church is, and can be, family for everyone in a way that biological families cannot. No matter whether your parents are still living—or whether they were ever loving—no matter whether you have a spouse or children or siblings or cousins, you have a family in the church.

Of course, not all churches live up to this ideal—any more than all families do—but as our first family, the church is the place we learn to become the persons we were meant to be. This is surely why the very first Christians, who were not biologically related to each other and in fact came from entirely different ethnic and economic communities, referred to one another as *brother* and *sister*.

But if the church is to be our first family, it cannot just be a friendly, weekly gathering. The first Christians met in homes, and those homes were not single-family dwellings but Greco-Roman “households” that often included several generations as well as uncles and aunts, clients, and indentured servants of the “paterfamilias.” The church too was a household—a gathering of related and unrelated persons all bound together by grace and the pursuit of holiness. ...

We’ve always needed a community wider than the solitary, nuclear family to thrive, and we surely need it now. Almost none of the commitments in this book can be realized by that minimal family unit. For technology, with all its gifts, poses one of the greatest threats ever conceived by human society to the formation of wise, courageous persons that real family and real community are all about.¹



¹ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

2. We want to create more than we consume. So, we fill the center of our home with things that reward skill and active engagement.

Number 2 flows from the biblical teaching humans are not made to consume, but to cultivate God's creation and to, in a derivative sense, create from creation's elements.

Genesis 1:25–31

²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

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

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹ And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2:15

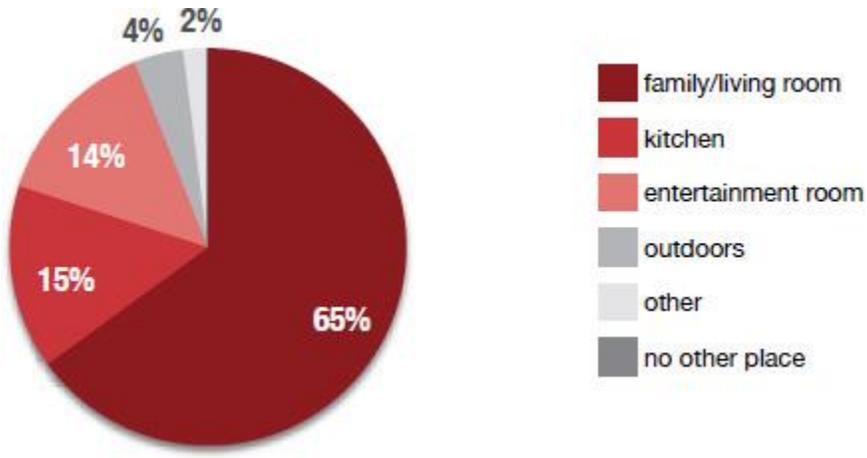
¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Specially:

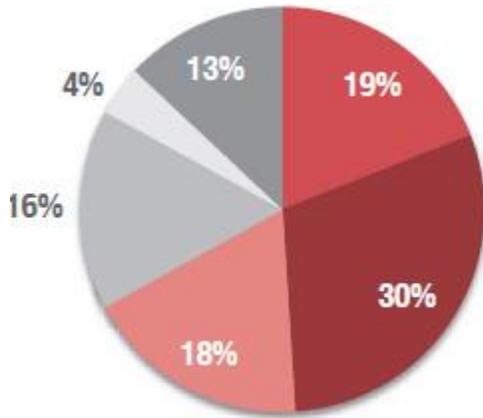
- Crouch suggests making the heart of your home screen and TV free. Fill the heart of the home with games, art opportunities, books, and things that promote active interaction with each other.

Gathering Spaces

Where in your home do you spend the most time as a family?



Is there another place where you spend almost as much time?



$n = 1,021$ US parents of children ages 4 to 17²

² Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

Crouch writes:

So if you do only one thing in response to this book, I urge you to make it this: Find the room where your family spends the most time and ruthlessly eliminate the things that ask little of you and develop little in you. Move the TV to a less central location—and ideally a less comfortable one. And begin filling the space that is left over with opportunities for creativity and skill, beauty and risk.

This is the central nudge of the tech-wise life: to make the place where we spend the most time the place where easy everywhere is hardest to find. This simple nudge, all by itself, is a powerful antidote to consumer culture, the way of life that finds satisfaction mostly in enjoying what other people have made. It's an invitation instead to creating culture—finding joy in shaping something useful or beautiful out of the raw material of the world.

Children, in particular, are driven to create—if we just nudge them in that direction.³

Senator Ben Sasse agrees writing:

Our young are more insulated from necessity, from the need to work hard, from the obligation not to consume more than they produce than any large community ever.⁴

Trevin Wax adds:

Consuming, Cultivating, or Creating

Here are the differences I have in mind:

- **Consuming:** the passive reception of entertainment. As consumers, we spend time entertaining ourselves through television shows, movies, video games, and so on. These activities demand little of us.
- **Cultivating:** the intentional development of something. As cultivators, we engage in something that makes a demand of us. It can be the development of the mind through reading and study, or cultivating of a skill or hobby, or restoring a car, or playing a musical instrument, or working in the garden. These activities require mental or physical exertion as we make something of the world we've been given. In turn, the activities develop us.
- **Creating:** the invention of something that did not exist before. As creators, we leave something behind for others to enjoy and benefit from. We might compose a piece of music, write a poem or story or article, or paint a portrait.

We live in a culture that drives us toward consumption, not creation or cultivation. The result is we assume *creating* is work and *consuming* is rest. We assume that anything that demands

³ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

⁴ Ben Sasse, *The Vanishing American Adult* (New York, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017), p. 151.

something of us must be tiresome and strenuous. And so, in our free time, we naturally gravitate toward the activities that are easiest and most immediately gratifying. We choose distraction over development.

...

Entertainment can be part of a well-balanced life. All of these activities have their place. But we need a strong dose of intentionality with how we spend our free time. How often are you cultivating or creating something? The trick is to choose cultivation or creation so often that you begin to *prefer* to create something rather than consume something. Once you reach that point, you've arrived at a place where you're unlikely to fall into the same consumptive patterns as everybody else.

You face a choice every day, week, month, and year. To create, to cultivate, or to consume. If Christians will regularly choose the former over the latter, we'll stand out in a world that knows only the immediate gratification of consumption. And we'll display for the world the joy of fulfilling humanity's purpose of cultivation, as we reflect the image of the One who made us.⁵



⁵ Trevin Wax, "Consume, Create, or Cultivate: Your Choice," *The Gospel Coalition* (May 3, 2018) <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/consume-create-cultivate-choice/>

3. We are designed for a rhythm of work and rest. So one hour a day, one day a week, and one week a year, we turn off our devices and worship, feast, play, and rest together.

Number 3 flows from the biblical teaching that God created humans to have a regular rhythm of work and rest, modeled by God in creation week, codified in the OT Law (especially in sabbatical regulations), and affirmed at least in principal for the NT Church.

Genesis 2:1-3

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Exodus 20:9–11

⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Mark 6:30–32

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

Crouch writes:

As technology has filled our lives with more and more easy everywhere, we do less and less of the two things human beings were made to do.

We are supposed to work, and we are supposed to rest.

Work is the fruitful transformation of the world through human effort and skill, in ways that serve our shared human needs and give glory to God.⁶

⁶ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

This pattern is fundamental to human flourishing, and to the flourishing of the whole world that depends on our care, but it has been disrupted and distorted by human greed and sloth. Instead of work and rest, we have ended up with toil and leisure—and neither one is an improvement. And strangely enough, technology, which promised to make work easier and rest more enjoyable, often has exactly the opposite effect.

Toil and Trouble

Think of *toil* as excessive, endless, fruitless labor—the kind that leaves us exhausted, with nothing valuable to show for our effort. This is, alas, the kind of work that many people in our world must do their whole lives. But toil actually can afflict even the people who seem to have “dream jobs.”

The journalist Dan Lyons, laid off from a position at *Newsweek*, found what he thought might be an exciting new calling at a technology start-up, an experience he describes with acerbic disappointment in his book *Disrupted: My Misadventure in the Start-Up Bubble*. It was “one of those slick, fast-growing start-ups that are so much in the news these days, with the beanbag chairs and unlimited vacation,” he wrote in the *New York Times*, “a corporate utopia where there is no need for work-life balance because work is life and life is work.”

But Lyons reports that the reality was more like “a digital sweatshop,” with “glorified telemarketers” who “spent long days cold-calling prospects, racing to meet tough monthly quotas, with algorithms measuring their productivity.”

The most poignant part of Lyons’s essay, though, is the location where these (mostly) young adults toiled with no job security and pay just above the minimum wage: a former factory building for the Davenport furniture company. The name Davenport has become synonymous with some of the most beautiful pieces of human craftsmanship ever created. In the “cavernous red-brick rooms” of that factory, Lyons recalls, “skilled craftsmen once labored on elaborately hand carved custom pieces—woodworking treasures that today can be found in museums and in the White House.”

Lyons recognizes that the artisans who made furniture in that factory undoubtedly worked hard. Their work was far more physically demanding, and because they lived and worked in the era before easy everywhere, nearly everything about their lives was difficult in a way that few of Lyons’s coworkers have ever experienced. And yet their work created something of lasting beauty—“treasures.” How likely is it that any of the employees who now work in that building are creating anything that will be seen as a treasure even five years from now, let alone five hundred years from now?

Instead of working, they are toiling—and of course, much worse forms of toil can be found in our world. Millions of people employed in factories around the world today, let alone those who can find no work at all, would gladly change places with Lyons’s fellow “digital sweatshop” employees. Still, what Lyons saw at that start-up is toil, not the

fruitful work for which we were made. And this is happening at a successful, widely envied company that employs the most privileged winners of our society's rat race.

Toil is not new—it has been with humanity since the fall—and technology can be a tremendous resource for real, valuable work. From the recording studio to the operating room, technology at its best allows us to create and care for the world in marvelous ways. Indeed, one of the proper places for technology is at work, where advanced tools allow us to use our skills in ways that are personally rewarding and widely beneficial. But Lyons's story is a reminder that technology can just as easily double down on our toil, demanding more and more from us while we produce less and less of lasting value.

If technology has failed to deliver us from toil, it has done a great deal to replace rest with leisure—at least for those who can afford it.

If toil is fruitless labor, you could think of *leisure* as fruitless escape from labor. It's a kind of rest that doesn't really restore our souls, doesn't restore our relationships with others or God. And crucially, it is the kind of rest that doesn't give *others* the chance to rest. Leisure is purchased from other people who have to work to provide us our experiences of entertainment and rejuvenation.⁷

He later explains:

Of course, fruitless toil and fruitless leisure existed before the technological age. A tiny number of families enjoyed almost complete leisure, while many families worked without respite and collapsed, exhausted, for a few hours of sleep, day after day. Some societies, including our own, bought the leisure of a few at the price of the literal slavery of many. Slavery is the ultimate in fruitless toil, work that does nothing to benefit the workers themselves or allow them the dignity of passing on skill, rewards, and a better life to their children.

But in the technological age, toil and leisure are, oddly, less divided along these lines of social class. Many of us, even the most apparently privileged, have the uneasy sense that our work, though it seems physically undemanding (in its complete lack of physical activity, it may even be actively dangerous to our health), is toilsome. Most of us can now afford to purchase extravagant amounts of leisure—Netflix will sell you more entertainment than you could ever consume for \$9 per month. But no amount of leisure can compensate for the sense that your life, whether poorly paid or well paid, is ultimately in vain.⁸

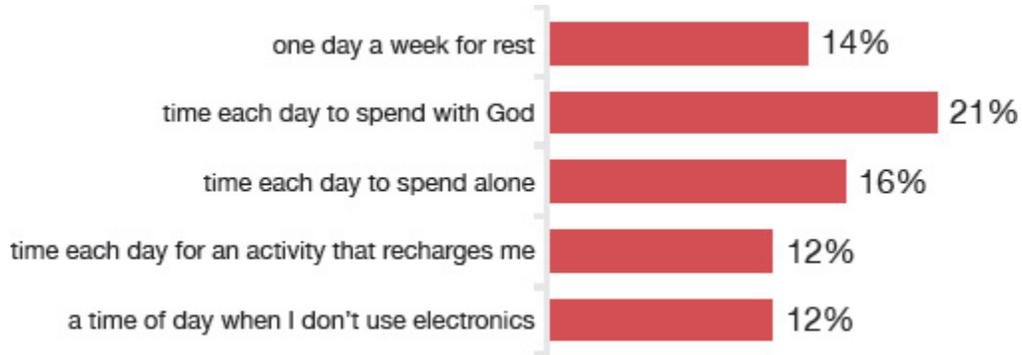
⁷ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

⁸ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

Digital Detox

"I set aside . . ."

% who say each statement is completely true

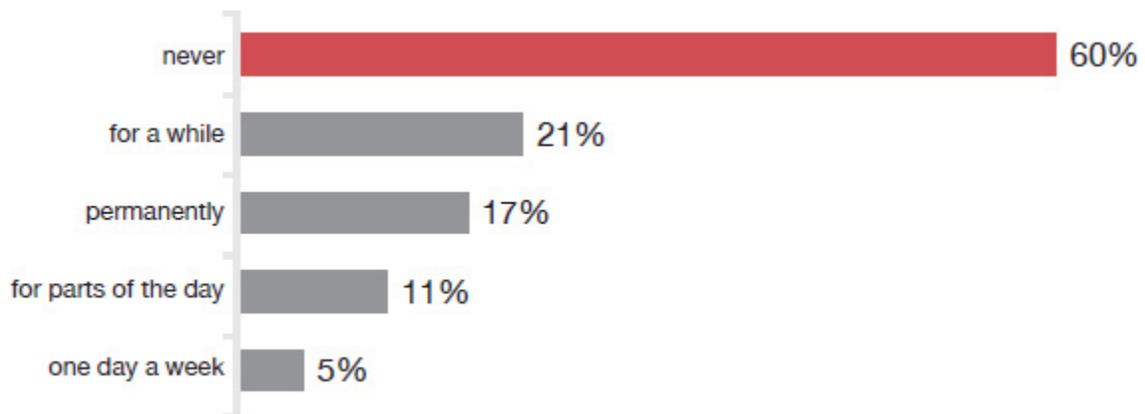


n = 1,404 US adults; June–July 2013⁹

Electronic Sabbaths?

Do you take regular breaks from social media?

Select all that apply.



n = 1,086 US adults; May 2013¹⁰

⁹ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

¹⁰ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).



4. We wake up before our devices do, and they ‘go to bed’ before we do.

Though Crouch uses personification about devices “waking and sleeping,” Number 4 flows from the biblical teaching that God created humans alone in His image and likeness and that no other part of creation (no matter how the elements are invented or developed) should inhibit human flourishing. Since God made humans as the pinnacle of creation and with the need to rest, humans should have mastery over devices—not the other way around! Further, humans should recognize that rhythms of rest are vital to their flourishing and faithfulness.

Genesis 1:25–31

²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

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

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” ²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2:1–3

² Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

Our Christian ancestors had bedtime prayer. One reason they prayed at bedtime has been largely lost on us today. They understood the phrase “fall asleep” to connote the helplessness falling conveys and the uncertainty of tomorrow apart from God’s grace.

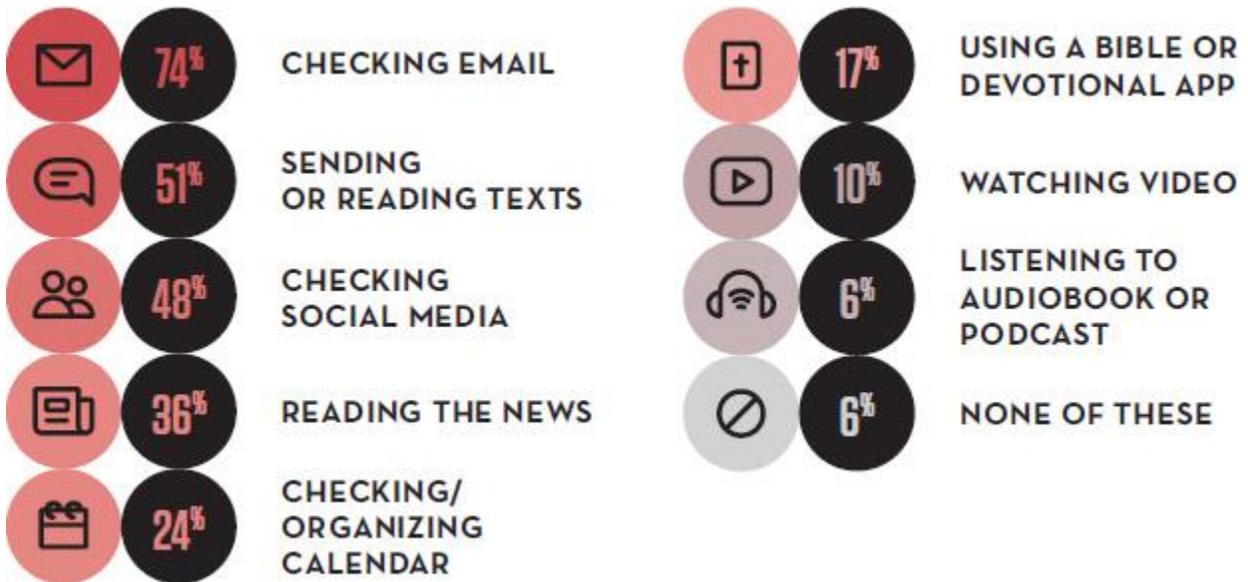
Specifically:

- How many of us check our phones in the first five minutes of waking up? We begin our day confronted with news of all manner of evil and problems in the world. His suggestion is to stand by the coffee pot and smell. Open the front door and breathe. Be human before you become a zombie again.
- Further, put the phones to bed before you go to bed.
 - Parents, do not let your children have any device, computer, or Internet access in their rooms or anywhere else *alone*.

GOOD MORNING

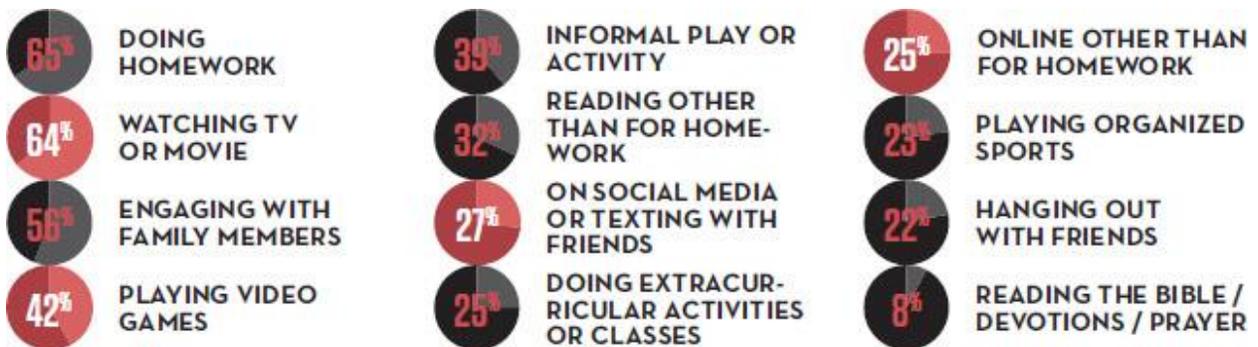
62%

... of parents check their phone within the first hour of the morning. *And what are they doing on the phone in that first hour of the day? Select all that apply.*



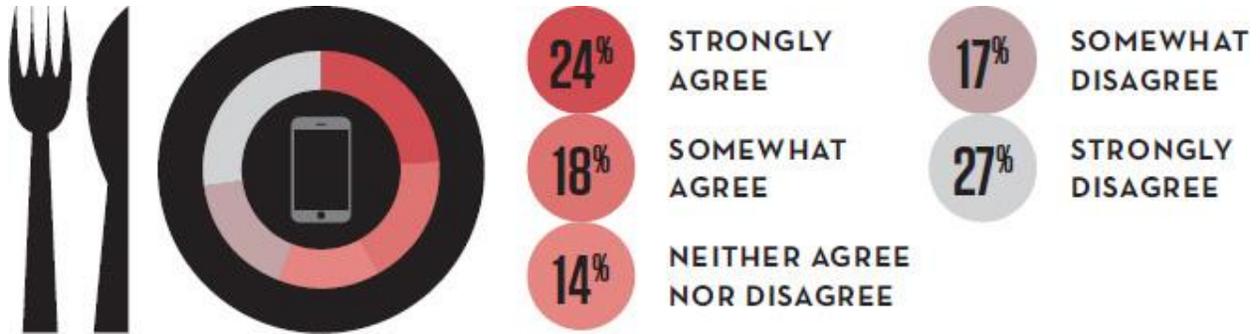
GOOD AFTERNOON

After school, kids spend most of their time ...
Select all that apply.



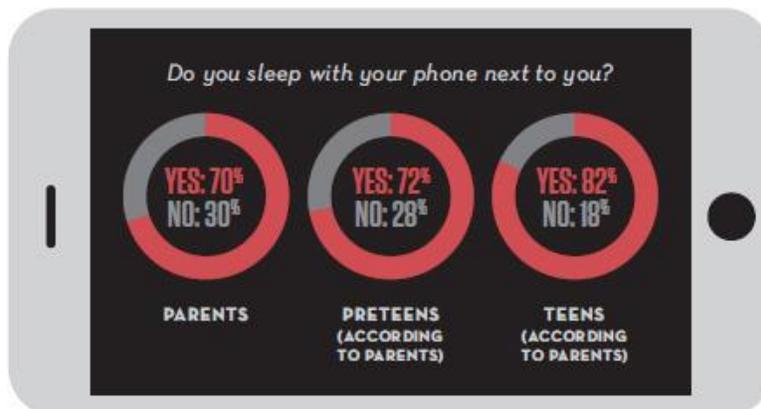
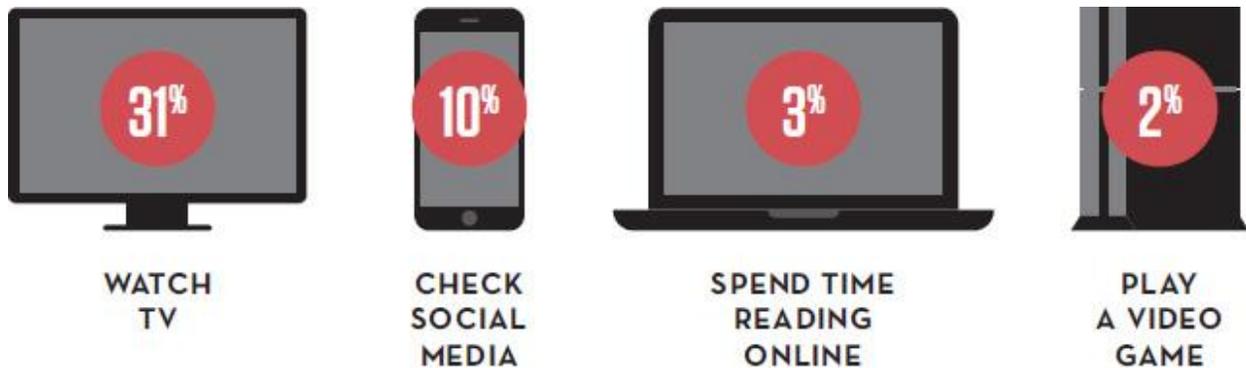
GOOD EVENING

More than 4 in 10 parents say electronic devices are a significant disruption to family meals.



GOOD NIGHT

What's the last thing parents do before bed?



$n = 1,021$ US parents of children ages 4 to 17¹¹

¹¹ Andy Crouch, [The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

Crouch writes:

Under the covers, as alerts light up the night, anxieties and fantasies are fed as often as they are allayed—for parents as much as children. And we lose out on what we were really made for: the deep rest that would make us more cognitively, emotionally, physically, and spiritually fit for the challenges the next day will bring. The lilies of the field close up their blooms at night and rest patiently for the next day, but we, cloaked in ghostly light, make tomorrow’s troubles today’s and tonight’s instead. The devices we carry to bed to make us feel connected and safe actually prevent us from trusting in the One who knows our needs and who alone can protect us through the dangers and sorrows of any night.

Sweet Dreams, Little Smartphone

So, we need a simple discipline: our devices should “go to bed” before we do. And to add a nudge to that discipline, it’s by far the best if their “bedroom” is as far from ours as possible. It may be that one adult, at least, needs a phone nearby at night in case of emergency, but most children and teenagers (and, um, dads) lack the self-discipline to turn their smartphones to “Do Not Disturb” and put them facedown on the bedside table for a solid eight or nine hours.

So find a central place in the home, far from the bedrooms, and park the screens there before bedtime.

(All this applies, a thousand times over, to the glowing overstimulation of television—surely the single least helpful thing, short of a jackhammer, you could ever put in a place where someone is trying to fall asleep. In fact, most television programming, designed to catch and keep the attention of a distracted public, is the visual equivalent of a jackhammer.) Buy a cheap alarm clock so you don’t have to rely on a smartphone to wake you up. Sleep specialists widely recommend that, once night comes, the bedroom should be reserved for just one thing: sleep (and, for the parents, romance). Make it so.

In the interval between putting the devices to bed and laying your own head on the pillow, spend a few minutes in the darkening quiet talking, praying, or reading by the calming reflected light from a page.

And then, in the morning, rather than rolling over to check for whatever . . . , get up and do something—anything—before plugging in. Stretch. Shower. Open the front door for a moment and breathe the morning’s air, humid or frigid as it may be. Make coffee or tea and wait for the brew to finish. There is something for you to discover in these moments just after waking that you will never know if you rush past it—an almost-forgotten dream, a secret fear, a spark of something creative. You’ll have the rest of the day tethered to the impatient wider world; let that wait a moment. Give your devices one more minute in their “beds.” Practice the grateful breath of someone who slept and awakened, given the gift of one more day.¹²

¹² Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

5. We aim for ‘no screens before double digits’ at school and at home. Crouch suggests no screens before age 10.

Number 5 flows from the biblical teaching that God made life to develop. God told humans to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28) and to then wisely nurture the development of children through stages of development with consideration as to what is best for each phase of maturation.

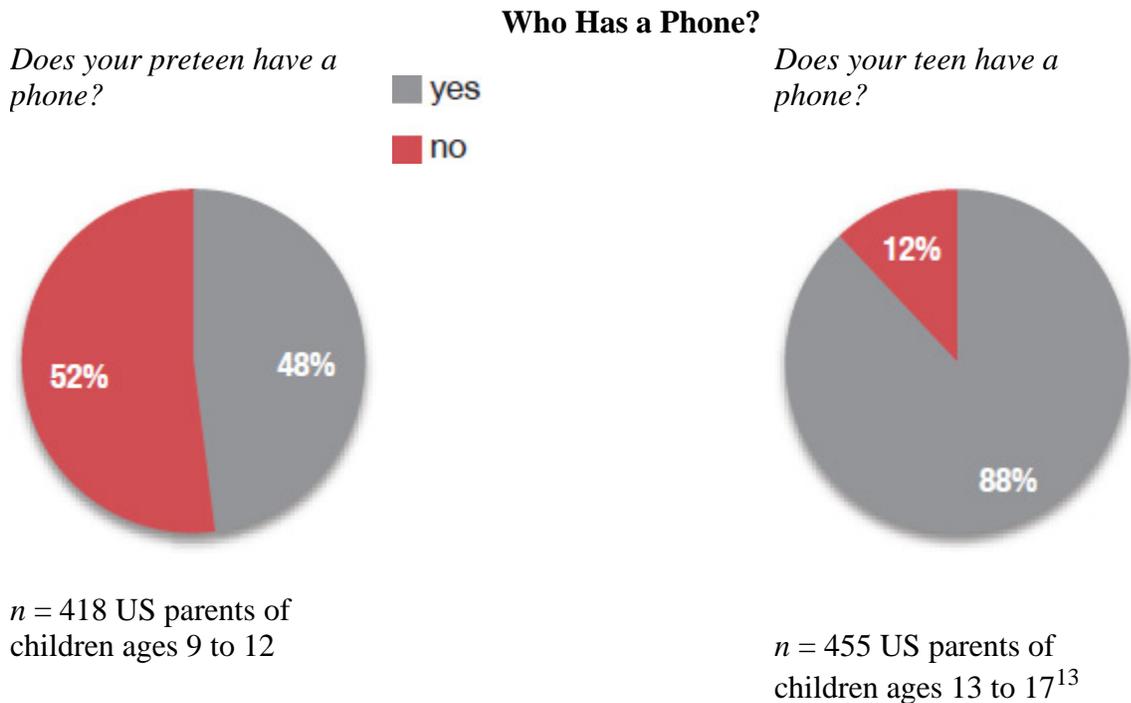
1 Corinthians 14:20
Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

1 Corinthians 13:11
When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

Ephesians 4:14-15
So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Ephesians 4:13
Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

Hebrews 5:12-13
For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.



¹³ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

Crouch writes,

Cognitive scientists like Maryanne Wolf, author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, and Abigail Sellen, a principal researcher for Microsoft who coauthored a book called *The Myth of the Paperless Office*, observe that the physical act of reading a book, with its bound pages, helps strengthen the learning of the concepts inside. ...

Likewise, physically taking notes with a pen or pencil on paper—the act of forming physical letters by hand, with the twists and turns of the letter forms and the accumulating fatigue and need for rest—turns out to aid memorization and learning, *even if we never consult the notes again*. ... All human thought requires embodiment, and without bodies we could not think. We can have a faint idea or hunch in our mind, but it is only when we speak or write it that it becomes clear, not just to others but to ourselves as well.

We are made to live and learn in a physical world. And no human beings are more exuberantly and fundamentally rooted in the body than children. As children, our bodies are full of energy and primed for physical learning. We are designed to explore our world and learn through all our senses.

So it could be that the proliferation of technology, especially screens, at earlier and earlier ages, may well be remembered as one of the most damaging epidemics of the twenty-first century.¹⁴

He adds:

The biggest problem with most screen-based activities is that because they are designed to keep us engaged, we can learn them far too quickly. They ask too little of us and make the world too simple. To learn to play an acoustic guitar requires hundreds of hours of practice involving physical strength and stamina, the development of calluses on the hand (usually the left) that holds down the strings, the ability to hear tiny variations of tone and timbre as we pluck and strum at different speeds and angles and to adjust our movements accordingly. A “guitar app,” on the other hand, vastly oversimplifies all these dimensions of embodied music making, replacing them with a skill that is far more easily acquired and requires far less learning.

And this might be totally fine—as *leisure*. But our first years on this planet are the time when we can be *learning*, when we are primed to learn in embodied ways. There is a whole amazing world to explore that requires body and soul together. And increasingly, instead of spending their days playing and learning in that rich, complex, demanding world, our children are engaging in the same kind of limited, limiting game-like activity that adults engage in to pass the time on their daily commutes. When our children could be making candy (learning about the different phases of sugar as it heats from soft ball to

¹⁴ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

hard crack, the glories of caramelization, the bitterness of burnt sugar—all the possibilities and dangers of heat), they are playing Candy Crush.¹⁵

Swimming Upstream

Many of the core commitments in this book are countercultural, at the very least. This one requires us to swim especially hard against the cultural flow. The sad truth is that many schools are intoxicated with technology, for which they can apply for scarce and precious grant money, and intimidated by suggestions that their students might end up “behind” others if they don’t start manipulating tablets and trackpads early enough. Parents who want their schools to choose another way will likely find themselves arguing not so much with actual research about the educational benefits of technology in elementary school as with vague platitudes about “moving education into the twenty-first century.”

Choosing no screens before double digits at home, and advocating for the same at school, is hard. Screens are easy. Screens are engrossing, absorbing, and rewarding for children just as much as for adults. If our goal is to have engrossed, absorbed, and easily rewarded children, we will turn to screens every time. And there are certain situations—for example, the encouraging ways that technology is assisting autistic children and their families to communicate—where screens and other devices are wonderfully useful. But for most kinds of learning, developing children’s minds and hearts with a deep connection to their bodies and the world around them, we’ll have to choose the more excellent way—glowing-rectangle free.¹⁶



¹⁵ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

¹⁶ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

6. We use screens for a purpose, and we use them together, rather than using them aimlessly and alone.

Number 6 flows from the biblical teaching that God created humans for communal relationships, even assessing Adam by saying “it is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). Though God’s initial assessment of Adam most directly issued in the first marriage, Scripture repeatedly returns to the concept of humanity’s design to be deeply communal in all sorts of human relationships. Furthermore, God originally created humanity to be actively working—even before sin’s entrance cursed the world.

Genesis 2:15

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Genesis 2:18

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

Kevin DeYoung records Senator Ben Sasse’s family plan:

In his new book, [*Them: Why We Hate Each Other and How to Heal*](#), Ben Sasse has a terrific chapter on setting tech limits. “At our house,” he writes, “after a healthy wrestling match about the dangerous ways social media tries to pull us away from the communities we care about the most, we put a list of 16 truths up on our refrigerator.” Sasse describes the list as “neither complete nor fancy,” but a helpful way for his family to think about digital communities versus real ones. I found this list full of easily forgotten common sense and good wisdom.

1. Your thousandth social media friend won’t make you any happier. Your fourth real friend will.
2. Uninterrupted time is life’s most valuable limited resource.
3. Most news isn’t news.
4. Envy isn’t good therapy. Rage isn’t good therapy. Working out is good therapy.
5. Do something now you’ll want to talk about at the dinner table tonight.
6. Political addicts are weird. (And there aren’t that many of them. They’re just loud.)
- 7A. I’d rather be with the people I’m with right now than with the people I’m not with.

- 7B. If #7A isn't true, then spend more time with the right people.
8. Develop the right addictions. (Another word for addictions is habits. Habits determine character.)
9. Not every bad thing in the world requires a response from you.
10. Not every mean thing said to you requires you to acknowledge it.
11. You're not omniscient. Don't assume your bubble of information is the whole story.
12. You're not omnipotent. Taking in bad news you can't do anything about doesn't help anyone.
13. Sports Twitter is infinitely better than political Twitter.
14. Lots more social media is fake bots than social media companies admit.
15. The little old lady on your block probably has an important unmet need today.
16. Social media isn't great for deep stuff. It's great for humor. Let's be known as a family that laughs hard. (p. 199)

Good stuff. Might look nice up on your refrigerator. Mine too.¹⁷

¹⁷ Kevin DeYoung, "16 Truths About Digital Time and Real Friends," *The Gospel Coalition* (January 17, 2019), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/16-truths-digital-time-real-friends/>

Crouch writes:

In the history of the human race, boredom is practically brand new—less than three hundred years old.

The English word does not appear until the 1850s, and its parent word *bore* (as a noun—“he is such a bore”) appears only a century earlier. The French word *ennui* begins to mean what we call “boredom” around the same time. Before the eighteenth century, there simply wasn’t a common word for that feeling of frustration and lassitude that overtakes so many of us so often—not just in long lines at the grocery store or the airport but in our own homes as well.

Could it be that modern life is boring in a way that premodern life was not? How could this be? Our world has more distractions and entertainments than we can ever consume. We feel busy and overworked in ways even our grandparents couldn’t have imagined (even as many of us work far less hard, physically, than most of them did).¹⁸

He adds:

This may seem totally wrong to any parent who has been desperate to quiet down restless young children. Put on a brightly colored, fast-moving video, and your kids will stay slack-jawed and motionless for the half hour it takes to get dinner on the table. (Is there any half hour more stressful in more homes than the one right before dinner? Friends of mine with three young children used to call it “the witching hour,” which is probably unfair to actual witches.) What could possibly be wrong with something that solves such an urgent problem so neatly?

The problem, as with so many short-term solutions, is that solving the immediate problem requires leaving a bigger problem unsolved—and actually makes the bigger problem worse.

How Videos Bewitch

The truth is that the real “bewitching” doesn’t happen when our kids are going half crazy with hunger and pent-up end-of-the-day energy and parents are feeling all the accumulated frustrations of the day. It happens at many moments when we give ourselves over to technological entertainment.

Because make no mistake: the videos we put on for our kids—or the video games we pull up on our phones in our own moments of boredom—are designed, unconsciously or consciously, to produce a bewitching effect. And that effect is achieved by filling a screen with a level of vividness and velocity that does not exist in the real world—or only very rarely. Because it is rare, we instinctively respond to it, and indeed take delight in it.

In my backyard, with its mottled shades of green, suddenly I spot a cardinal flitting from one tree to another. He is vivid red and gone in a flash. If I hadn’t been gazing out the window, I would have missed him. During a moonless night, a meteor suddenly streaks across the sky, just barely catching the corner of

¹⁸ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

my vision. Only by lying on my back for minutes or hours did I make myself available to see that brilliance.

But the entertainment we serve up to our children, and ourselves, constantly fills the screen with movement as swift as the meteor's and colors as brilliant as the cardinal's. It is purposefully edited to never require too much concentration or contemplation; instead, it grabs our attention and constantly stimulates our desire and delight in novelty. But in doing so, it gradually desensitizes us as well.¹⁹

He further explains:

Watching movies or TV shows from the early days of moving pictures reminds us of just how frantic this attention-holding game has become. In the early days, cameras could stay still and on-screen subjects could utter whole paragraphs of dialogue. Now cuts get faster and faster; colors get more and more saturated. Keeping us entertained is getting harder and harder. We are bored far more easily than we once were.²⁰

Crouch writes:

Boredom is actually a crucial warning sign—as important in its own way as physical pain. It's a sign that our capacity for wonder and delight, contemplation and attention, real play and fruitful work, has been dangerously depleted.

Boredom may have peaked at the height of the industrial age, as children sat in mechanical rows of desks at school and adults were slotted into assembly-line rows, whether in blue-collar factories or white-collar offices, reduced to cogs in an industrial machine. But there is a new challenge in our postindustrial times, with vast amounts of computing power channeled into screens we carry everywhere. We now have the technology to be perpetually distracted from boredom, and thus we never realize how bored we really are.

Standing in every line you will see people thumbing through an infinite scroll of messages, images, news stories, and posts on their glowing rectangles. ... We are not bored, exactly, just as someone eating potato chips is not hungry, exactly. But overconsumption of distraction is just as unsatisfying, and ultimately sickening, as overconsumption of junk food.²¹

He concludes:

It is surely not coincidental that all the earliest citations of the word *bore* in the Oxford English Dictionary—from the mid-eighteenth century—come from the correspondence of aristocrats and nobility. They did not have technology, but thanks to wealth and position they had a kind of easy everywhere of their own. The first people to be bored were the

¹⁹ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

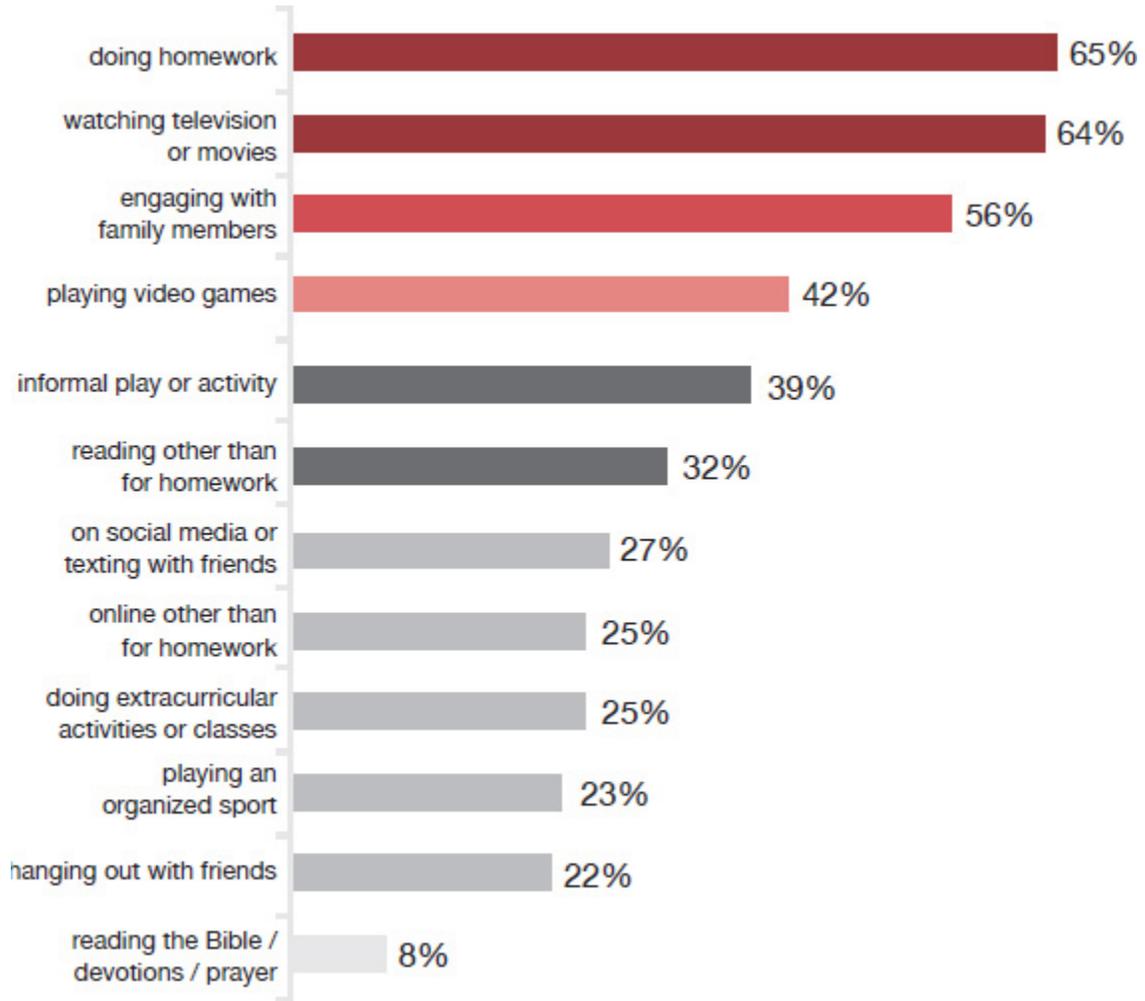
²⁰ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

²¹ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

people who did not do manual work, who did not cook their own food, whose lives were served by others. They were also, by the way, the very first people to have lawns.³²²

Weeknight Plans

*On a typical weeknight, how do your children generally spend their time?
Select all that apply.*



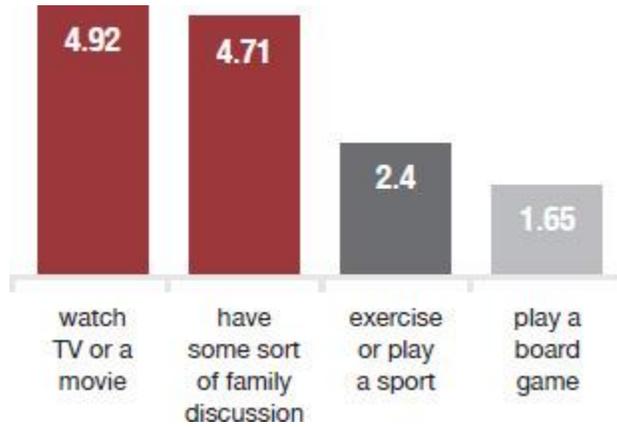
n = 1,021 US parents of children ages 4 to 17²³

²² Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

²³ Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

Family Time

*In the past two weeks, how many times did your family do any of the following together?
Mean average among all parents.*



$n = 1,021$ US parents of children ages 4 to 17²⁴



²⁴ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

7. Car time is conversation time (not screen time)

Number 7 flows from the biblical teaching that God created humans to communicate. God Himself walked and talked with Adam and Even in the Gard of Eden in the cool of day. God has chosen in His ultimate wisdom to reveal Himself in Word (Scripture). God designed humans to communicate not just consume performances, et. al. which avoid relational building through communication.

Proverbs 25:11–12

¹¹ *A word fitly spoken
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.*
¹² *Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold
is a wise reprover to a listening ear.*

Crouch:

Seven Minutes and Counting

The author Sherry Turkle, who has done so much to help us realize the dangers to real relationship that come along with technology’s promised benefits, suggests in her book *Reclaiming Conversation* that most conversations take at least seven minutes to really begin. Up until that point, we are able to rely on our usual repertoire of topics—the weather, routine reports about our day, minimal and predictable chitchat. But around seven minutes, there is almost always a point where someone takes a risk—or could take a risk. The risk may be silence; it may be an unexpected question or observation; it may be an expression of a deeper or different emotion than we usually allow. All true conversations, really, are risks, exercises in improvisation where we have to listen and respond without knowing, fully, what is coming next, even out of our own mouths.

The tragedy of our omnipresent devices, Turkle suggests, is the way they prevent almost any conversation from unfolding in this way. A conversation interrupted several times before the seven-minute mark does not get deeper more slowly; it stays shallow, as each party makes room for the other to opt out and return to their device. What might be on the other side of the seven-minute mark, we never find out.²⁵

²⁵ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).



8. Spouses have one another's passwords, and parents have total access to children's devices.

Number 8 flows from the biblical teaching that God created humans without sin or evil. Before they chose to rebel against God and brought about the Fall of humanity, Adam and Eve were “naked and not ashamed” (Gen 2:25). As I have taught in other venues, God’s design for human relationships—especially marriage—is trust and transparency. Indeed, human relationships can never enjoy the one without the other. Intimacy requires both commitment / transparency and covenant / trust.

Genesis 2:25

²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Specially for technology:

- Parents, you must know your kids’ communications—both what they are saying but also what others are saying to them. This is hard with disappearing communication apps, but do the best you can. If your child protests, it means you have a problem. No secrets. Spouses need full access all the time and should be non-defensive about it. *Nothing to hide, nothing to fear.*

Crouch writes:

There is nothing in our society that has surrendered more completely, and more catastrophically, to technology’s basic promise, easy everywhere, than sex.

For countless generations, sex was hardly ever easy, and it certainly was not everywhere. It was not *easy*, above all, because it was intimately connected to the begetting of children, and the arrival of a child is one of the most gloriously complicated events that can befall a human being. As far as possible from being *everywhere*, sex was meant to be confined to a single lifelong marital relationship, where—as almost any married couple can tell you—sex can be fulfilling and rewarding, but it is by no means always easy.

The one-flesh union of traditional marriage, as it was understood for centuries, united two biologically differentiated creatures who, while both image bearers of God, were almost always invested with profoundly different sexual capacities, desires, and needs. And the

lifelong nature of that ideal union meant that marital sex did not just encompass the breathless, hormone-fueled days of early attraction but also long years of middle age and old age—all subject to the vicissitudes of each partner's health, each one's waxing and waning desires, and the thousand ups and downs that come with any lifelong relationship. Furthermore, many human beings would spend long seasons of their lives outside such a union, whether because of lack of a suitable partner, a call to priestly or monastic celibacy, or their husband's or wife's early death.

The sexual drive is among the most powerful sources of human behavior, so it is no surprise that even in the most traditional environments, the norms of marital sexuality and nonmarital chastity were bent and broken in countless ways. But the powerful social incentives to conform to the underlying norms, along with the ever-present likelihood of conceiving a child from male-female intercourse, meant that while there was probably always plenty of extramarital sex, it would never, ever have been described as easy everywhere.

In the span of one lifetime—my own, which conveniently enough began in 1968, the year that marked the apex of the social and sexual revolutions of the twentieth century—all these norms have been swept away. For most American youth and young adults, thanks to the relentless messaging of popular and mass culture, sex is indeed everywhere. This is true not only in the imaginative world of media but also in their actual experience, in relationships unsupervised by adults or extended family. Especially among young adults, but even among many middle schoolers and high schoolers, the easy-everywhereness of sex is dramatically increased by easy-everywhere access to alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs. They cast a haze of lowered inhibition over the inescapable vulnerability of sex, even for the most jaded and “experienced.”

The norm, now, is for sex to be everywhere, available to everyone at every stage of life and in every configuration of desire, and to be easy—that is, unencumbered by consequences, hang-ups, or commitments. Marriage is now an entirely separate matter; it is not about the sexual union of two profoundly different expressions of human image bearing but fundamentally about a declaration of love by two people that is usually meant to include sexual exclusiveness but is by no means the exclusive domain for sex. Sex itself can and should happen, especially according to the dominant cultural messages, wherever there are willing and consenting participants—two, or more than two, or for that matter just one.

All this has been tremendously assisted by technology. Above all, technology has made contraception affordable, routine, nearly foolproof, and low maintenance. And medical treatments have rendered most sexually transmitted diseases (now simply and casually called “infections”) manageable for most residents of the affluent Western world.

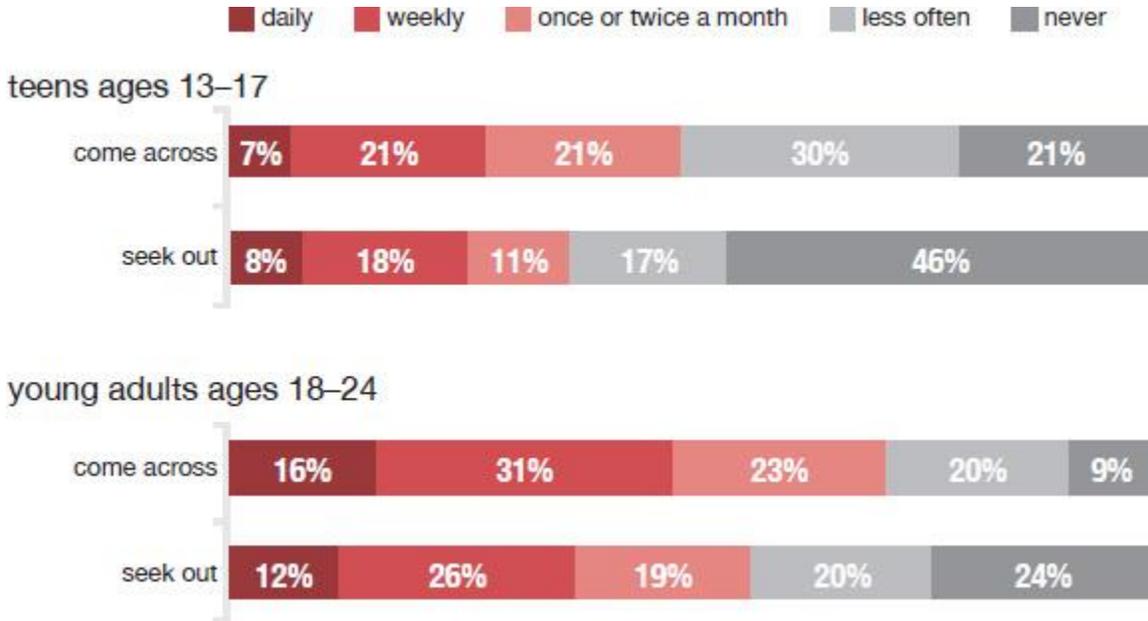
With sex dissociated so completely from the family, it is perhaps not surprising that family itself, so totally the opposite of easy-everywhere life, is being reconfigured. One in three children in the United States live without their biological father in the home. And as family becomes less solid and stable, the parental oversight that used to guide and restrain youthful sexuality diminishes. Growing up without one's biological father, specifically, is related to everything from early onset of puberty, to early initiation of sexual activity, to vulnerability to sexual advances from nonbiologically related household members like stepfathers and half siblings.² Even those who grow up with both their mother and father are often plunged into the unsupervised environment of college at age eighteen, and on average they will not marry until their late twenties, if

they marry at all. Adrift in this chaotic and complex environment, young people have to sort out for themselves a vision of what sex is and should be.

And right there to help them acquire and manage a technology-saturated, easy-everywhere view of sex is the ultimate easy-everywhere sexual technology: pornography.²⁶

The Ubiquity of Porn

*How frequently do you come across or seek out porn?
% among US teens and young adults*



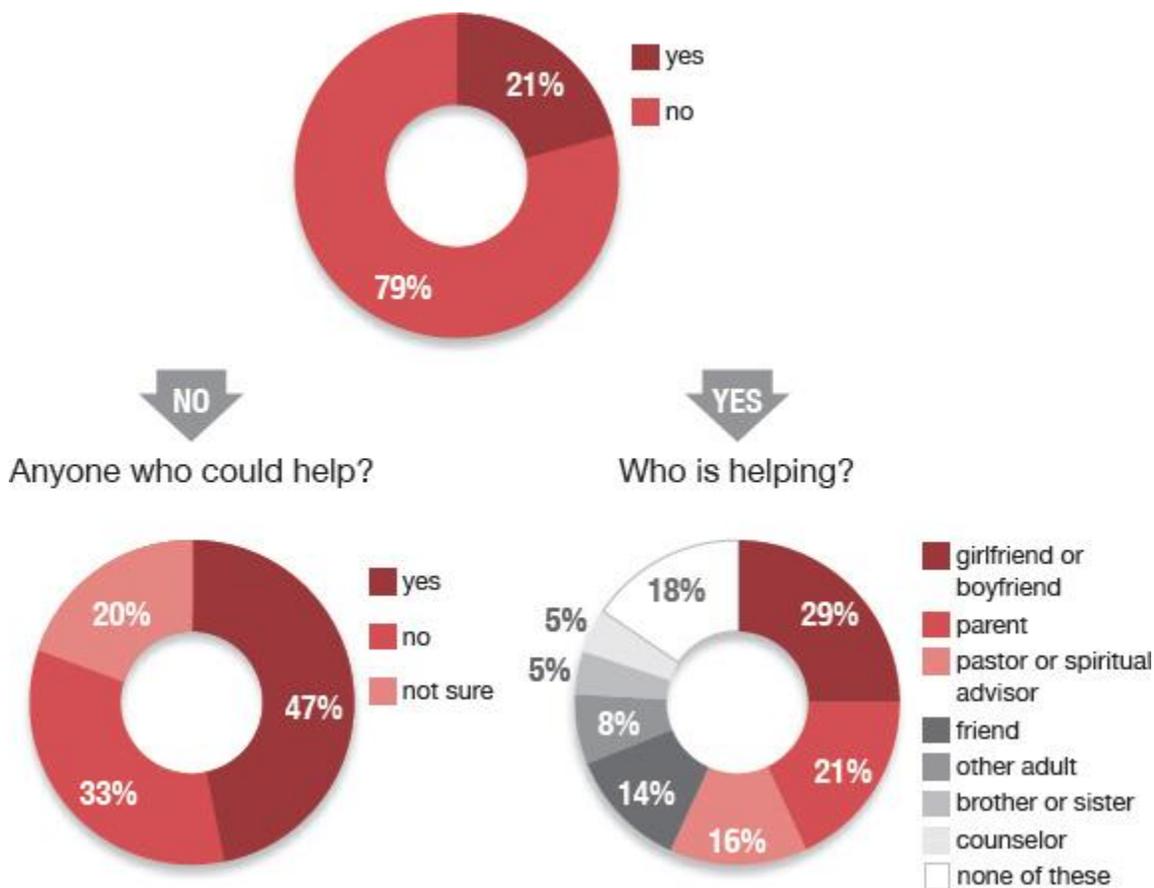
n = 813 US teens and young adults ages 13 to 24; July 2015; due to rounding, numbers may not add up to 100; ©Josh McDowell Ministry²⁷

²⁶ Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

²⁷ Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

The Loneliness of Trying to Quit Porn

*Do you have anyone in your life who is helping you avoid pornography?
% among US teens and young adults who would like to stop using porn*



n = 351 US teens and young adults who say they want to stop using porn; July 2015; ©Josh McDowell Ministry²⁸

²⁸ Andy Crouch, [The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

Crouch writes:

Likewise, spouses should have one another's passwords and should cultivate the complete freedom to ask one another anything at any time. Even more than parents and children, spouses are bound for life as "one flesh." This level of access is not a matter of managing, let alone preventing, failure and sin. It has a simpler and deeper purpose: to keep us deeply connected to one another in ways that make failure and sin both less attractive and less damaging to our souls and our relationship. All sin begins with separation—hiding from our fellow human beings and our Creator, even if, at first, we simply hide in the "privacy" of our own thoughts, fears, and fantasies. Anything that short-circuits our separation, that reinforces our connection to one another and our need for one another, also cuts off the energy supply for cherishing and cultivating patterns of sin.

Will we avoid the technological maelstrom of easy-everywhere pseudosex (since that is all it is, nothing like the real, far more complex and beautiful, God-given thing) by keeping our filters up, sharing our passwords, and monitoring our children's devices? Hardly, any more than residents of the most polluted cities in the world can purchase enough air filters to avoid ever breathing in noxious fumes and dangerously tiny particles. But we can limit the damage it does to ourselves, our marriages, and our children. To use an older and hilariously apt metaphor attributed to Martin Luther, we can't stop the birds from flying over our head, but we can stop them from building a nest in our hair.

We rob the easy-everywhere world of its power to seduce us not so much by the rules we put in place as by the dependence on one another we cultivate—depending on one another to help us be our best selves, growing in wisdom and courage and serving one another, in a world that wants to make us into shallow slaves of the self. Among the most heartening findings in the largely horrifying research on pornography use and addiction is that even people who plunge into addiction can emerge from that shallow madness, retrain and rewire their brains, and rediscover real intimacy.²⁹

²⁹ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).



9. We learn to sing together, rather than letting recorded and amplified music take over our lives and worship.

Number 9 flows from the biblical teaching that God created humans to make music and to sing it when present with one another. Gathered music in worship occurs throughout Scripture. God's people in the Old Testament sing with one another (e.g. Exod 15). God's church is commanded to all sing together when gathered (Col 3:16; not to have musicians perform but for the whole congregation to sing). The final book of the Bible, Revelation, records a heavenly future of God's people singing with one another.

Exodus 15:1

*15 Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying,
"I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.*

Colossians 3:16

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Crouch writes:

Once upon a time, we knew how to sing.

It's true in American life generally. When I was a boy, the national anthem was sung at baseball games and patriotic events by the entire assembled crowd. It wasn't sung *well*, necessarily—that high note on “rocket's red *glare*” was often pretty disheveled—but it was at least attempted.

Now, I can't remember the last time I was in a public place where the whole crowd had the job of singing the national anthem. Instead, we've assigned that job to experts, professional or aspiring singers who sing on our behalf (sometimes badly, but still boldly). The rest of us simply do what we are going to do for the rest of the game: watch, listen, and enjoy as someone else demonstrates skill and courage.

This is also true in American Christianity. We once knew how to sing. Many great renewal movements within Christianity have been linked with a renewal of communal singing. ...

There are still places in American life where you can hear amazing singing welling up from an entire gathered community, not just from a professional chorus or choir. Almost all of them are in church. But even in church, those places and moments are fewer and fewer. In my travels around the United States, I'm in many different kinds of churches and worship environments. I've also studied singing and worked as a professional musician, ..., and I know something of what human beings are capable of doing with their voices. In most places I go, the singing is a faint echo of what would be possible from the people assembled if they were asked, let alone trained, to sing.

Not that our churches are without music. Our worship bands are more technically proficient than ever, and louder than ever. The people holding microphones are singing, often expertly and almost always passionately. It's just the rest of us who, like the crowd at a ballgame, are mostly swaying along, maybe echoing a few of the phrases or words.³⁰

Crouch expands:

It is absolutely possible to learn to really sing. You may or may not be able to learn to sing on pitch, but you can learn to sing with heart, mind, soul, and strength. The best time to begin to learn is in childhood, when our brains are primed for learning, our neuromuscular system is most able to be trained to connect mind with strength, and we are fearlessly willing to try something new. And of all the components of well-led worship, singing is the one that is most immediately accessible and engaging to children (listening to sermons takes a while longer!).

So the tech-wise family will do everything in their power to involve their children from the earliest possible age in expressions of church that model this kind of worship—not just the pleasant ditties of Sunday school or “children’s church” but the full-throated praise that can come from people of every generation gathered in the presence of God. Maybe that isn’t the Sunday-to-Sunday reality where you worship (it’s only sometimes so in our own church), but it’s worth exposing our children to the communities and places that have kept alive the powerful tradition of Christian song.

And as much as possible, we’ll sing at home, when friends and family gather, as we clean up the kitchen and fold the laundry, as we celebrate holidays like Christmas and Easter, when we get up in the morning and when we lullaby ourselves to sleep. Our singing will be nothing like the auto-tuned, technologically massaged pop music that provides the bland sound track for the consumer life; it will be the sort of singing you only can do at home, where you are fully known and fully able to be yourself. And it will be a rehearsal

³⁰ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

for the end of the whole story, when all speech will be song and the whole cosmos will be filled with worship.³¹

Senator Ben Sasse agrees writing:

Anecdotally, it is almost impossible to get our 13- and 15-year-old daughters to make music together . . . until they realize that we are serious that no TVs or other screens are coming on at our house on a given night. Then, almost like magic, within ninety minutes they are spontaneously gathered around the piano with a guitar or a violin composing and singing. They are producing rather than consuming—and we're all most satisfied.³²



³¹ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

³² Ben Sasse, *The Vanishing American Adult* (New York, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017), p. 90.

10. We show up in person for the big events of life. We learn how to be human by being fully present at our moments of greatest vulnerability. We hope to die in one another's arms.

Number 10 flows from the biblical teaching that God created humans to be present. Indeed, this is the very point of the “incarnation” when “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). God the Son came to be born in human flesh to be present to connect God and humanity. Repeatedly, Jesus speaks the importance of being present (e.g. Matt 18:20; John 14:3; 2 Tim 4:16–18; Heb 13:5).

Matthew 18:20

²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. ”

John 14:3

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Crouch writes:

One of the great gifts of technology is the simulation of presence at a distance. Starting with the telephone (which literally means “distant speech”), and continuing in recent years with Skype and FaceTime, we have been able to communicate, with higher and higher fidelity, with people far away. Now that our son is in college, thirteen hundred miles from home, we have a weekly video call as a family that has brought some of the best conversations we have had in his whole life—at no cost beyond the devices and services we already have.

Of course, much of the distance between us and people we love is itself the result of technology. It is partly because of air travel that we can imagine sending our children thousands of miles away from home in the first place; we can move away from our parents for a new job, or simply a more exciting location, knowing that we can visit them with a relatively easy car or plane trip. Technology, which does so much to close the distance, also enables much of the distance in our lives.

But even the highest quality Skype connection is not enough for the really important moments in a human life. You can think of it purely in terms of information, which can be measured as a stream of digital bits. A high-definition video call transmits something like 1.2 megabits per second and can provide amazingly clear sound and images of the

person we are talking with. But when we are present in person with another human being, our bodies are probably taking in and absorbing many gigabits per second—a thousand times more information. This information is not just in the form of sight and sound, both far richer and more subtle in person than even the highest quality connection can provide, but potentially comes through all the other primary senses as well: touch and smell and even taste. And almost certainly our bodies sense another person’s presence in ways that we are not even aware of, let alone able to record or transmit. Any sort of mediated presence is the palest shadow of what it is like to be with another person in person—that is, present in the fullness of what our bodies make possible.³³

Crouch writes:

Showing Up

So the last, best commitment we can make in our mediated world is to show up, especially for the moments when we are most deeply human—which is to say, most deeply connected to our bodies. In old wedding vows the groom would say, as he put the ring on his bride’s finger, “With my body I thee worship.” A Christian wedding unites two bodies in such a way that they become not “one soul” but “one flesh.” Although many couples cherish the video recordings of their wedding, no one should aspire to be married by video. Showing up in person at a wedding, even just as a guest, is a way of honoring that bodily commitment, just as showing up in person at a funeral is a way of honoring the fullness of the one we loved. And these public moments are so significant because they correspond to even more profoundly intimate bodily realities. Though these invitations are rarer, for good reasons, there is nothing so holy as to be present for a birth—or for a death.

When we show up, especially in the course of family life, we encounter what technology tries so hard to delay or erase: the limits and fragility of our bodies.

Our families care for us as infants, when our bodies are impossibly small and fragile and incapable, at first, of even the simplest self-care. They see us wail with distress as well as laugh in delight. They hold us close in those first weeks and smell perhaps the most amazing aroma in all of human experience, the fragrance of a newborn child—or they smell some of the most noxious odors a human body can produce.

Our parents see us in the gangly awkwardness of adolescence, and adolescents see their own parents subtly softening (and often fattening!) into middle age.

We see one another, at all ages, laid low by fever, noses running with colds, or bent over the toilet in nausea—and these are just the most common and unremarkable sicknesses. Our families also see us in far graver circumstances—coming home from what was meant to be a routine exam with a terrifying diagnosis; recovering from life-saving but physically devastating surgery; reeling from sudden and permanent change from accident or war or violence; descending gradually but unmistakably into confusion and dementia, no longer able even to recognize the ones we have most loved.

³³ Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

And our families see us, and we see them, in the final passage of life. I believe it was the author Wendell Berry who made the devastating observation that in every family that gathers around the Thanksgiving dinner table, one member will one day be left entirely alone, having buried all the others. We bind ourselves to one another with all our love and loyalty, but one day all those bonds will be severed by loss.

...

For one thing we can say for sure is that when we are at our body's very limits, nothing but personal presence will do. A few years ago I had the great gift of being invited into the bedroom of my friend David Sacks, born in 1968 just like me but brought to the end of his life by cancer that, by the time it was discovered, had erupted throughout his body. After a glorious and grace-filled year of life made possible by medical treatment, David's illness outran the drugs. In his last days he lay on his bed. The body that once had effortlessly beaten me in game after game of squash was now unbearably thin and weak. David was an internationally celebrated photographer, but he would never make another image. He had sent me countless text messages over the years—I never will have the heart to delete them from my phone—but now he was beyond text messaging. He had created a Facebook group where he and his wife, Angie, chronicled the story of his cancer diagnosis, treatment, and all the ups and downs that followed, but he would never again update it.

But he was still there, still with us, still able, just barely, to hear us praying and singing—able, in moments of lucidity, to open his eyes, take in the small group of family and friends gathered around his bed, and know he was not alone. His brother brought a guitar and we sang, several nights in a row, Matt Redman's song "10,000 Reasons."

The technology was over. The easy-everywhere dream had ended. Now we could only be here, in our own vulnerable bodies, present to the immensely hard reality of a friend, father, son, and husband dying. Over the bed was a framed, calligraphed rendering of David and Angie's wedding vows.

It was one of the hardest places I have ever been. It was one of the most holy places I have ever been. It was one of the best places I have ever been.

Homeward

We are meant to build this kind of life together: the kind of life that, at the end, is completely dependent upon one another; the kind of life that ultimately transcends, and does not need, the easy solutions of technology because it is caught up in something more true and more lasting than any alchemy our technological world can invent. We are meant to be family—not just marriages bound by vows and the children that come from them, but a wider family that invites others into our lives and even to the threshold of our very last breath, to experience vulnerability and grace, sorrow and hope, singing our way homeward. We are meant not just for thin, virtual connections but for visceral, real

connections to one another in this fleeting, temporary, and infinitely beautiful and worthwhile life. We are meant to die in one another's arms, surrounded by prayer and song, knowing beyond knowing that we are loved.

We are meant for so much more than technology can ever give us—above all, for the wisdom and courage that it will never give us. We are meant to spur one another along on the way to a better life, the life that really is life.

Why not begin living that life, together, now?³⁴



³⁴ Andy Crouch, [*The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017).

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