



Technology

Adapted from *Restless Devices* by Felicia Wu Song, Author and UVA Alum

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

-Colossians 3:1-2

As a college student, technology and the internet play a large role in your day-to-day life. You use them to check your grades, submit assignments, apply for internships, schedule meetings, and more. Not much changes after graduation; everyone from consultants to professors to CEOs to software engineers to truck drivers rely on technology for their work. And of course, new social media platforms are popping up every day, fighting for and demanding your attention. It's unavoidable. As technology becomes more prevalent in our daily lives, it can be easy to dedicate more time and attention to our devices, time that is better spent elsewhere. As we spend more time plugged in, our devices form and shape us in ways we may not recognize for a long time.

Thankfully, this is not a resource on how to simply avoid technology in your life because that would be futile. Rather, we need to *reframe* how we use our devices and learn how to take back control from those who manufacture them. **How can we recognize the ways technology has formed us and make intentional choices to ensure our formation is centered around Jesus?** As Felicia Wu Song, author of *Restless Devices*, puts it, “lifting our eyes off our screens and living more deeply into the time and place in which we are embedded.”

Our Modern World

Think about how many times a day you pick up your cell phone. Most smartphones calculate it for you, and you can see exactly how much time you spend on any given app, how many texts you send per day, etc. Those numbers can be harrowing; we don't realize how much time and attention we are giving to our devices. Why did we become so engrossed with our phones? How have we become perpetually plugged in? Song writes,

“Just as the digital is always accessible to us, we come to expect the same of people...We have fast become a people who are always available, always on call. Young people grow up into their friendships and personal identities in this engrossing fog of social pressures, stresses, and anxieties that had—until this point in human history—mainly been the purview of surgeons, firefighters, and workaholics. (And even then, first responders and doctors were professionally obligated to take time away from their beepers).”

Like doctors and first responders, our phones have forced us to always be on call. We constantly feel the need to catch up on emails, texts, social media, and the news of the day. When the internet was first conceived, it was a space you had to intentionally enter by sitting at a desk, firing up a boxy computer, and logging into dial-up internet (as long as someone wasn't using the home phone). Now, the digital space has entered *our* world; it's in our pockets, our living rooms, our kitchen counters, and even our



bedrooms, all running on high-speed internet. We no longer need to “do” anything to get connected—we *are* connected.

Smartphones and the internet differ from past technological revolutions because they are specifically designed to attract both our time and attention. Unlike devices like the typewriter, lightbulb, or dishwasher, our devices are more than just tools to help us accomplish tasks. Every day, the brightest minds in the world are tweaking algorithms and designing new apps, all in an effort to capture more of our clicks, scrolls, and likes, which generates more revenue for them. The digital world is not neutral, and it’s certainly not out to make us healthier people. The tech industry is keenly aware of this: they know that we will be formed by the habits we keep, and their goal is to develop habits in us that make us return to them. Many tech executives or former tech executives will restrict their kids from using technology because they understand how the technology works better than anyone!

Digital Liturgies

Every time we open our phones, we are chemically programming our brains. When we get a notification, our stress response, cortisol, is activated, and whenever we open our phones to answer a message or scroll Instagram, dopamine, our pleasure response, is increased in the brain. This cycle of stress and pleasure is very similar to what gambling addicts describe when using a slot machine, which explains why we constantly check our phones even when we know there isn’t anything there. Technology has also pushed us to be maximally productive, or as Song calls it, “hypertasking.” Since technology allows us to do five things at once, why would we ever waste our time doing nothing? Well, as Song points out,

“The irony of it all is that the very technology that promises to help us organize and efficiently deliver in our lives and relationships has merely subjected us to an avalanche of unprioritized demands on our attention and our lives.”

Because of these addictive tendencies and the desire to hypertask, we aren’t using our time and attention well—we’re just giving our attention away. These practices are called “digital liturgies.” In the same way that the church has liturgies, such as saying the Lord’s Prayer before a sermon or raising hands during the benediction, our devices build habits into us. When we hear “ding” or feel a vibration, we respond by opening our phones. When we wake up, instead of making our bed and starting the day with peace, we immediately reach for our phones and see what we missed overnight. As Song puts it, “in the same way that Jesus called his disciples to become a people who abide in him as he would abide in them, we too have become a people who abide in the digital, and the digital abides in us.”

Counterliturgies

At this point, it may sound like the only solution is to take a sledgehammer to your phone and throw your laptop in a dumpster. Not only is that impractical, but it also won’t solve our problem. Instead, we need to counter our digital liturgies with new habits, aka “counterliturgies.” The following exercises are what Song calls “The Freedom Project,” an assignment she gives to her college classes. These are not exhaustive, but they’re great ways to start building healthier practices and take control back from your devices!

- I. **Stage 1: Digital Media Fast**—Go without any form of digital communication for 24 hours. This includes all text messaging, web browsing, social media, smartphone apps (even the weather



app!), digital music (both streaming and CDs), streaming platforms like Netflix or YouTube, and video games (including mobile games). You should also abstain from digital news, including sports updates. You are allowed to use email and texts for work/school purposes or emergencies, but try and talk to friends and family before your experiment to limit those. You are allowed to read print media: books, newspapers, magazines. You may watch broadcast TV or go to a movie theater! This is hard to accomplish for 24 hours, so don't feel pressured to make this a permanent lifestyle, but you can take lessons from it and apply them every day!

1. Before the fast, make plans that will help you stay offline for the day.
2. After the fast, journal what changes/adjustments you had to make, what you did with your day, and how you felt.

II. **Stage 2: Stocktaking**- This is less about *change* and more about *understanding* your current habits and responses in the digital world.

1. *Monitoring Digital Usage*: Download a time-tracking app, such as Screen Time, Moment, or Rescue Time. Before you begin monitoring, write down how many times you think you pick up your phone and how much time you spend on your phone per day. Track these over 5 days and compare with your guesses. How accurate were you? Did anything surprise you?
2. *Going Under the Microscope*: Be hyperalert about your digital routines for one 24-hour period. Ask the below questions and reflect on the dynamics and trends you observe.
 - a. In what situations am I nearly always using my phone? Are there triggers that automatically motivate me to reach for my phone?
 - b. What is my physical/emotional state right before/after I use my phone?
 - c. Are there moments when I realize I don't have my phone? How do I feel then?
 - d. When do I feel engaged, joyful, effective, & purposeful? Where am I? Who am I with?
3. *"Phone Meditation" Exercise*: First, sit and become aware of your current feelings, posture, and focus/distraction level. Take out your phone and hold it. What changes do you notice in yourself? Posture, feelings, focus, etc. Next, unlock your phone and open a frequently used app. Spend a few moments scrolling or messaging, then observe yourself again for any shifts. Then turn off your phone and put it out of sight. Sit for an entire minute without doing anything. Take note of any differences again. Write and reflect on this activity as a whole.
4. *Motivation Check*: Put a "stop sign" on your phone, either on your wallpaper or with a post-it note/rubber band. Ask yourself each time you pick it up: What am I going to do? Why now instead of later? What else could I do right now besides check my phone?

III. **Stage 3: Counterliturgy**- Try new activities that push back against your digital/secular liturgies!

1. Create a new bedtime/morning routine that doesn't involve your phone. Maybe start your day by making your bed, exercising, reading/journaling, or enjoying the outdoors. In the evenings, read a book, write a note of gratitude, play music, or enjoy a cup of tea!
2. Make a "sacred zone" around your bed for five days. Create a charging station for your phone/devices that is further away from where you normally set it, either across the room or in another room altogether.



- a. If you use your phone as your alarm, buy a physical alarm clock instead! You can use a watch to wake you up while your phone is across/outside the room.
3. Experiment with monotasking. Choose an activity: studying, cooking, chores, gardening, etc., and do that activity without focusing on anything else during that time. Start with a small amount of time (20-30 minutes) and work your way up to monotasking for longer.
4. Protect your sacred times. Block apps, video games, streaming services, and social media during certain times of the day, such as before bed and right after waking up. Observe when you run into these limits, and whether you want to break through them or find something else to do instead.

Hopefully, whether through these exercises or others like them, we can all improve our relationship with technology and, more importantly, improve our connection with the world around us and the God who created it all! Technology plays a huge part in our lives, and it's vital to our mission to spread the truth of Jesus around the world. By having healthy digital habits, we will display a life centered around the peace and love of Jesus to a world engrossed in screens, a world longing for a better way.

Relevant Scriptures

Psalm 91:1

...Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High

John 15:5

...If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit

1 John 2:15

...Do not love the world or anything in the world.

Questions for Discussion

- What has been your relationship with technology, specifically your smartphone?
- Which of these counterliturgies do you need to practice the most?
- How will your improved relationship with technology help you share Jesus with others?

Recommended Reading

Restless Devices by Felicia Wu Song

How to Break Up with Your Phone by Catherine Price

