

Synopsis

The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place

Technology advances more rapidly than anyone can imagine. It offers great conveniences amidst the stress and busyness of modern living. However, it also upsets many areas of life. Parents feel helpless in preventing their children from the constant exposure to inappropriate content, while at the same time, children also compete for their parents' attention which are glued to life demands created by technological progress. Crouch acknowledges that it is not helpful to distance ourselves entirely from the advantages offered by technology; he believes that there is a better way. It is a radical way because many may find it inconvenient, even Christians. The world continues to divert and capture our attention, enticing us to choose the convenient way of letting technology run our lives. Thus, to choose the better way, the better option must be more visible to nudge us. It is a choice that seeks to prevent technology from taking over our lives and put it at its proper place. Nonetheless, the nudge alone is insufficient. It must be coupled with the discipline to choose better especially when the world is unfavourable towards that choice. Crouch then suggests the ten commitments to cultivate that habit, so that we may be more inclined to opt for the better way in dealing with technology.

The first three commitments are fundamental; it is the foundation of other commitments. These commitments seek to build our character, to shape the space that we live in, and structure the time that we are given

- Crouch suggests that there are two basic virtues that must be cultivated in life, i.e. wisdom and courage. Wisdom helps us to guide our course of actions based on our understanding of the reality that should point us to honour God. Courage brings the conviction to act out what we know we should do. He believes that these virtues can only be nurtured in the household of God, in which we find people who love us and care for our growth in such a way that they uncover our foolishness and cowardice, and then draw our capacity for wisdom and courage especially in dealing with the difficulties of life. He observes then that improper use of technology may cripple us from nurturing these characters. In the past, tools that helped mankind to do their work required patience and practice to skilfully use them. The tools did not work on their own. However, today's sophisticated technological advancement is increasingly providing us with user-friendly devices that require almost no effort to learn and will automatically do the work for us. This does not mean that technology is bad, but it means that the convenience that it brings may not form us to be the godly men that we should be, which should eventually lead us to use the technology wisely and courageously.
- The commitment to shape space focuses on filling the focal space of living with things that cultivate creativity, relationships, and engagement. It is an intentional decision to replace fully automated technological devices in our space to less or non-technological items that demand more work/effort from our part for these purposes. In the context of the home, for example, the dishwasher may be replaced with hand-washing the dishes, social media may be silenced for spending time in family conversation or play, and electronic toys may be substituted with various natural materials.
- Another observation that Crouch makes in relation to the use of technology is that mankind do less and less the two things that they are supposed to do, which are work and rest. Instead, they busy themselves with toil (fruitless labour) and leisure (fruitless escape from that labour). He examines that many men work more and more but produce less and less of lasting value, leaving them exhausted without any tangible results. They find escape in leisure in which rest for the soul and restoration of relationship with others and God are not experienced. Crouch proposes to make small changes through rediscovering the meaning of Sabbath. It is the day in a week when all devices are turned off to do something which are both demanding and rewarding, such

as cooking and crafting. This can progress further to a commitment to turn off the devices one hour a day and one week a year.

The next five commitments deal with fostering the habits/disciplines of daily life. These habits include the ritual of waking and sleeping, learning activities, dealing with boredom, encouraging conversations, and promoting accountability. These are five areas that hopefully may bring a healthier life with technology.

- Human beings need sleep. Therefore, it is essential that a man has a place where he can sleep undisturbed and unafraid. Unfortunately, innovations in technology has greatly disrupted this essential need. The first wave comes after the invention of electricity brings continuous bright light after sunset. This is compounded with the creation of portable communication devices, such as laptops and smart phones, which are within reach day and night and producing constant disturbance to our sleep. One simple adjustment is required. Our devices should be put to sleep before we do by leaving them out of the bedroom so that we may be able to spend a few minutes of preparation for sleep without the devices. Additionally, do something in the morning before plugging in to those devices such as opening the front door, breathing in the morning's air, and brewing hot tea.
- Humans have a soul and a body. Crouch observes that the richest learning experiences happen when it involves physical activities. Reading a physical book, for example, helps strengthen the learning compares to reading on a digital screen because "physical activities engages our brains in ways that mere thought or contemplation does not" (Crouch, p.126). Consequently, he believes that the introduction of technology diminishes physical learning experiences and substitutes them with oversimplification of rigorous learnings through technological devices. Therefore, it is important to balance the use of technology, especially working in front of the screens, with activities in the three-dimensional physical world that actively engages the human body.
- Crouch observes that boredom only appears starting from the modernisation of living in the 19th century, in which technology has been providing endless bewitching distractions and entertainment. They encourage subconscious demands for more without which boredom is resulted, crippling men from enjoying the abundance of everyday wonders and delights. Thus, he suggests that there is something that should be done in the way we employ technology. It should be done with a purpose in mind instead of for aimless distraction or entertainment.
- Throughout his time as a parent, Crouch realizes that there is a place where conversation can be nurtured best. It is in the car when the family commutes and around the dining table when the family dines together. Research has shown that a meaningful discussion starts after seven minutes into the conversation. He laments at the reality that most people who commute are tied down to their devices and miss the opportunities to interact when they can be together for more than seven minutes. Hence, it is important for people to appreciate the importance of conversations and set the pattern of having more than seven minutes conversation by switching their devices off.
- The last commitment in the second section is driven by the porn-saturated culture: access pornography is made even much easier with the advancement of technology. He appeals to the evidence that this diminishes real intimacy in relationship. At the same time, the emptiness created by the longing for intimacy pushes for more urge to dwell in pornography which lead to addiction. Crouch believes the antidote to counter this culture is a full life, in which the previous four habits of daily living are fostered. These should be reinforced with the habit of accountability in which parents establish their authority to know what happen in their children's lives especially in their use of technological devices. It is also important that the parents exemplify this. Husband and wife should give authority to each other on the same matter.

The last section sets the two greatest tasks that human is made: to love God and others. These are the last two commitments that Crouch sets in the book.

- Crouch sees the importance of singing as the expression of loving because through singing, we can worship God well. In his opinion, singing has greatly declined even in the church because it is substituted with professionals who utilize technological devices to amplify the expression, leaving others as spectators who merely watch, listen and enjoy. It is an unfortunate reality because he believes that singing “perfectly combines heart, mind, soul, and strength” (Crouch, p.191), which is essential for worshipping God. Therefore, it is necessary to build the habit of singing as much as possible to enjoy God’s gift and to use it to glorify Him through our worship.
- Crouch highlights the value of human presence in the family as well as living with others. This is true in every moment of one’s life from childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and even to the final passage of life. It is regrettable if human presence is devalued and substituted with technology. Crouch brings up an example of facing death, in which more than often the dying person is treated in an expensive and impersonal technological saturated environment far from home and loved ones. Human life is fragile and vulnerable. It is worth living when it is filled with the real presence of people.