

“In the first century AD, the first Christians used the Roman roads to carry the gospel to the world. The Roman roads were created for both military and commercial use, but the first believers used it to share the message of Christ. The internet is our Roman road today. It is not always used for good, but Christians have the opportunity to have a powerful missional presence in the digital world. Digital Dominion is an incredible roadmap to tell us how believers should travel these roads today.”

Thom S. Rainer, Founder and CEO, Church Answers; Author of *The Post-Quarantine Church*

“Digital discipleship is an emerging area of urgent focus in pastoral ministry. How do we become faithful disciples of Jesus in such an over-stimulated, often-unwise digital age? How can we make sure technology isn’t using us more than we’re using it? Jeff Minge’s book is an excellent, practical engagement with these timely questions. Those in ministry or training for ministry would benefit greatly from applying the book’s wisdom in their lives and ministry spheres. We need to be asking these questions and having these conversations!”

Brett McCracken, Senior Editor, The Gospel Coalition; Author of *The Wisdom Pyramid: Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World*

“Digital devices, like all devices, have the power to bless or curse, to build up or tear down. Without wisdom from above and the moral steel to act on that wisdom, we will be cursed and possibly destroyed by the plethora of digital devices at our fingertips. Digital Dominion is both timely and desperately needed in our day. It is grounded in biblical and theological truth. It is also practical and sensible. Read it with much profit and then go and put what you have learned into practice.”

Daniel L. Akin, President, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Christians today live in the digital age, with its perils and promise. This requires an awareness of and discipleship toward healthy habits of engagement with our devices and with the interconnectedness of the world. Digital Dominion is a helpful guide to steer us away from two extremes: either total disengagement or total immersion. This issue of digital stewardship is one of the most important discipleship issues of our time. And this book is a must-read for anyone, from pastor to parent to plumber, who wishes to honor Christ well with their online lives.”

Daniel Darling, Director, Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; Bestselling author of several books including *The Dignity Revolution*, *The Characters of Christmas*, and *A Way with Words: Using Our Online Conversations for Good*



Digital Dominion

FIVE QUESTIONS CHRISTIANS SHOULD ASK
TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR DIGITAL DEVICES



JEFF MINGEE

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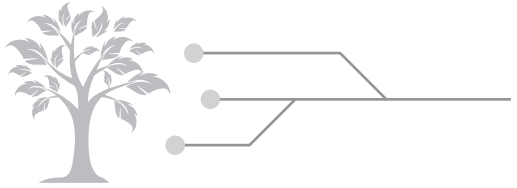
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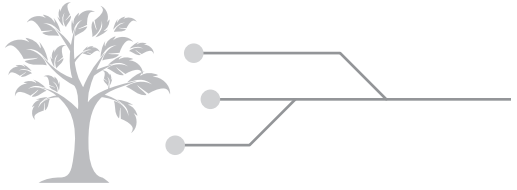
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Introduction

Part of responsible, wise, faithful use of tools is analyzing the ways that certain tools shape us to see the world in certain ways, and then to ask whether those ways are consistent with the life of a disciple of Christ.

Jacob Shatzer¹

The questions you ask determine the answers you get. In this book, we're going to ask five questions about our digital devices and our digital habits. Along the way, we will uncover sobering statistics about our practices as well as consider

¹ Jacob Shatzer, *Transhumanism and the Image of God: Today's Technology and the Future of Christian Discipleship* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2019), p. 7.

new, and more life-giving, habits. We'll move from being unintentional to being purposeful.

Wise Christians are running the wrong way with digital devices. Like children with scissors, some sprint without care and others freeze in fear. Dread tells us never to move with scissors. Wisdom teaches us *how* to move with them.

We need to know *how* to use our digital devices.

While I certainly understand, and sometimes applaud, a reasoned retreat or season of disconnecting from the digital world, I also feel a sense of remorse when wise Christians check out of the digital sphere. It's one less light in a very dark space. One less missionary on a very lost field. We need their voice not their vacancy.

I get the misgivings Christians have. I too am weary of the digital world. Yet the answer to our weariness is not abandonment, but dominion.

Dominion will help us control our devices instead of being controlled by our devices. Our digital world influences us with each notification, app, and upgrade. We are swimming in a digital culture which calls for digital wisdom. And like our inflatable floaties, wisdom is only good if we

use it. We need control in our digital lives. That's what dominion is: wisdom applied.

Christians apply biblical wisdom to their digital practices. Biblical wisdom is a lamp unto our digital feet and a light unto our digital path.² This light exposes the realities of our digital habits. It provides wisdom for those willing to apply it.

Missionary Lesslie Newbigin returned to England after serving for decades on a foreign mission field. Reflecting on his homeland after an extended time away, Newbigin observed, "It is only as the fruit of sustained exposure to the Bible that one begins to see familiar things in a new light."³ Our digital devices are now familiar things. They require sustained exposure to the Bible. Failing to shine the light of Scripture on our digital devices will have dramatic consequences. As our digital devices shape us, we need wisdom to exercise dominion over them.

2 This idea was originally presented by Bruce Ashford, Lecture for DMin 8504, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (October 2018), paraphrasing Psalm 119:105.

3 Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 8.

My aim is to equip you to take control of your digital devices. Throughout the book, I will refer to technology. While technology includes a variety of subcategories, we will focus on digital devices. God intends for you to take control—to exercise dominion—over your digital devices.

There is little doubt that you are digitally engaged. Take a look around. How many digital devices are within eyesight in this moment, or when you're sitting in your living room? Next time you're at a stoplight, notice how many people are looking at their phones. When you're grabbing coffee with your friend, notice whether or not your phones are on the table. Are they face up? How many times are you distracted from your friend by a notification?

Americans spend an average of five and a half hours a day with digital media, more than half of that time on mobile devices, according to the research firm eMarketer. Among some groups, the numbers range much higher. In one recent survey, female students at Baylor University reported using their cell phones an average of ten hours a day. Three quarters of eighteen-to-twenty-year-olds say that they reach for

their phones immediately upon waking up in the morning. Once out of bed, we check our phones 221 times a day—an average of every 4.3 minutes—according to a UK study. This number actually may be too low, since people tend to underestimate their own mobile usage. In a 2015 Gallup survey, 61 percent of people said they checked their phones less frequently than others they knew.⁴

This is our world. And this is us.

Perhaps I should clarify. This is not only “us.” More precisely, “this is me.” I’m not writing this book for you, but for myself. I’m not only disheartened and concerned over your digital habits. I’m far more concerned and far more disheartened over my own. Too often I find myself mindlessly scrolling while loved ones sit nearby. Too often I find myself with a day that reflects more time on social media than in communion with God. I think about who I am becoming, and I don’t always like the answer. I belong to Jesus and I have so much joy to

4 Jacob Weisberg, “We Are Hopelessly Hooked,” *The New York Review of Books* (February 25, 2016); <https://www.nybooks.com/issues/2016/02/25/>

discover in a life lived in obedience to him. I do not want to waste it staring at a screen that fits into the palm of my hands.

As I have already mentioned, we will—after an introductory chapter—explore five questions aimed at helping you regain control of your digital devices. In chapter one, we will discover how God’s command to exercise dominion applies to our digital devices. In chapter two, we ask, “Am I in control?” In chapter three, we explore the influence of our devices and habits through the question: “How is this shaping me?” In chapter four, we consider God’s aim for humanity and whether or not our devices serve that aim as we ask, “Does this help me flourish?” In chapter five, we shine the light of biblical wisdom on our digital habits with the question: “Can I discern wisdom and folly?” Finally, in chapter six, we move from being passive recipients to purposeful users for Christ’s glory: “Am I being missional?”

Our dependence on digital technology is not going anywhere anytime soon. Arguably, it will increase. As people responded to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, they shifted even more of their lives online. After telling students that they needed to detox from screen time,

schools moved to digital learning and required students to spend untold hours in front of their devices. Employees moved to remote working. Churches shifted to streaming their services. The cause of social justice pulled advocates and those interested even further into their digital devices as they watched videos, read articles, and engaged in digital debates. These factors led Collin Hansen to recognize the digital dilemma as one of his top ten theology stories in 2020.⁵

For many Christians, failing to exercise digital dominion has gone hand in hand with neglecting our spiritual health. New apps and episodes fill our hearts more than new mercies. By regaining control we both reorient our hearts to Christ and repurpose our digital devices to make much of Christ.

My hope is that we can shine the light of the gospel onto our digital habits. Blogger Tim Challies explains, “Media ecologists like to remind us that our technologies are extensions of ourselves and our abilities, so that the hammer is an extension of the arm and the

⁵ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/my-top-10-theology-stories-of-2020/>

bicycle is an extension of the feet.”⁶ Our digital devices are extensions of our hands and, further still, our hearts. The gospel explains that our hearts, our very selves, are made in the image of a holy God who is our Creator. In his kindness, he has given us good rules by which to live and enjoy his kingship. Since the time of Adam and Eve, however, we have turned our hearts in other directions, all in disobedience to him. As a result of this rebellion, we have lost the original enjoyment of our heavenly Father. We are now enemies of the God who made us and are bent on living out this enmity in every arena of our lives. And so we would remain but for Jesus. Sent by God, Christ lived the obedient life that we failed to live. Commissioned by God, Christ died on the cross—bearing the punishment that each of us rightly deserved as God’s enemies. On the cross, God poured his righteous wrath on his Son in our place. Buried, Jesus proved his authority over sin and death through his resurrection three days later. And God now reconciles us to himself by faith in this crucified and risen King.

6 Tim Challies, “Advanced Technologies and Basic Christianity;” <https://www.challies.com/articles/advanced-technologies-and-basic-christianity/> (accessed February 6, 2019).

INTRODUCTION

For those of us who are in Christ, this gospel changes everything. At a basic level, it changes ownership. We are no longer our own. We have been bought with a price. Therefore, we are to glorify God in our bodies and with every extension of those bodies, including our digital devices.