

“STEWARDSHIP OF GOD’S GIFT OF INTERNET: WISDOM IN A SMARTPHONE WORLD.”

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Scripture Texts: I Samuel 13:13-14; I Chronicles 12:32, Romans 12:2

Introduction.

Do you know what is the most frequently asked question today? What is the question we are asked more than any other question? “Did you see this online?” “Have you seen this meme, this video, this reel, this TikTok, this YouTube?”

I like a funny video clip as much as the next guy, but what is this steady diet of funny fail videos and dashcam crashes and crazy dances doing to our souls?

Who shows video clips that build up our faith and encourage our walk with Jesus?

Thank God for people like Randy Small who bless us almost daily with stunning pictures of God’s creation here in Whatcom County. They are cause to give God glory and edify our souls.

I want to challenge our thinking this morning about the internet world and how we can be better stewards of God’s gift of technology, how we can be wise in a smartphone world.

Do you know who is the greatest influencer in the world today? It’s not who you think it is. It’s not Taylor Swift or Elon Musk or Lionel Messi. Actually, it is not any athlete or Hollywood star or politician.

The greatest influencer in the world today is *algorithms*, social media algorithms. Algorithms are the invisible hand guiding what you see and in what order on every social media platform. Algorithms are the scientific and mathematical computer rules that take into account everything you do on your computer or smartphone.

This is why when you look at something to purchase, all of a sudden there are all kinds of ads for that product no matter where you go on the internet. Some of us wonder if just thinking about it causes it to appear.

Algorithms watch everything you click on, where you search, what you post, what you like or share, what images or videos you watch, how long you stay on a page. Then using all your information and past user behavior, it determines what content to display, in what order and how often. These algorithms in Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter all have one purpose, one goal in mind. To keep you interested and engaged on their platform as long as possible.

The internet world we all live in is being personally, expertly crafted to wield influence over our lives and thinking and behaviors and choices and decisions. The world you see online is different than the world I see whether we are talking about what we buy or the news we see, or the entertainment being offered.

This is why we all have the experience of getting hooked and drawn along and suddenly realizing we just wasted two hours binging and scrolling. Algorithms are meant to keep us engaged and connected online. Algorithms create this world that is all about us, feeding us just what we want. To say it another way, it is constantly tempting us through our desires and felt needs, and then addicting us to want even more. In a real sense social media algorithms expose before our eyes the desires of our hearts. Who can resist?

Instead of “driving under the influence” we are onlining and scrolling under the influence. This is how we become what we scroll. So as Christians how do we navigate this technological world and keep from becoming what we scroll? God’s Word is eternal and eternally relevant and speaks to our hearts and modern world.

Wisdom in a Smartphone World.

In the OT we learn about the kings of Israel, the men who led the people of God. We know that there were good kings and bad kings, wise kings and foolish kings. And so it is with all people.

In I Samuel 13 we are told of the downfall of the very first king of Israel, King Saul, who disobeyed God and acted foolishly, and it did not go well for him. God judged his folly by removing his kingdom from him and removing him as king, and giving his kingship to someone else. That someone else was David who is described as a man after God’s own heart. That is the mark of wisdom.

In I Chronicles 11 David is anointed king of Israel, and in I Chronicles 12 there is a record of David’s mighty men who surrounded him and supported him and helped him in battle. We are told they were men of valor and honor, men skilled in warfare, experts at wielding spears and swords, men willing to defend their king.

But one group of these men stood out, something is said of them that was not said of anyone else. The men from the other tribes numbered in the thousands, but these 200 men from the tribe of Issachar stood out above the rest.

I Chronicles 12:32 Of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.

They understood the times, they knew the Canaanite culture, they knew who the influencers were, they knew what the tempting idols and addictions were. They were wise and they knew what ought to be done. That is the definition of wisdom, having knowledge and knowing what to do with that knowledge. This is the difference between being smart and being wise.

Both Jesus and Paul warned about the danger of not knowing the times or what to do. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for being able to interpret the weather but “you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:3). Paul urged us:

Ephesians 5:15-17 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Who are those who are wise today? Where are the men of Issachar today? Who is wise in our world, meaning not full of the world? Where can we go to get wisdom? Would you rather be smart or wise? Where can we find a wise phone?

Transformed not conformed.

Rom 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Paul issues a serious warning here. The world is doing something to your head. The world is getting inside your head and messing with how you think and behave. Wake up before it is too late, and you make a shipwreck of your life and your faith the way a lot of people are.

We are being distracted and amused and entertained to death. And as a result we are losing our ability to discern what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We are drinking from the fire hydrant of the world, and taking a sip every now and then from the wells of salvation and the wells of God’s Word. And then we wonder why we are more like the world than the Word.

There is an absolute principle hardwired into our world, you will reap what you sow.

Galatians 6:7-8 Whatever a man sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Don’t sow to the fleshly desires, sow to the Spirit. Don’t be conformed to the worlds ways, be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

This passage encourages believers to approach life with wisdom and discernment, particularly in a world filled with technological advancements. It urges us to reflect on how we engage with technology, urging us to use it wisely and redemptively in light of the moral challenges it presents.

Ephesians 4:17-19, 22-24 You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have

become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

22 put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Don't be caught up in the futility of the world's thinking, it leads to darkness and depression.

Hebrews 5:12-14 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, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Do you want to be immature or mature? Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok are designed to stupefy you and to give voice to every immature, foolish, banal idea out there in the world.

How many hours have we binged on reels, Instagram or Facebook feeds, or TikTok channels? How conformed are we to petty, trivial, superficial pursuits of the world? How up are we on all the latest news, memes, funny videos? And are we better for it? Is it helping us love God and love our neighbor?

Be not conformed to this world. One major problem is we are all conformist down to the bone, going along with what is around us, being influenced by those around us, peer pressure is a real thing. We like to fit in. Fear of missing out is real.

Someone gets something, and we all want it. Someone starts up a bandwagon and then everyone wants to jump on. We are imitative by nature.

How many Swifties are there in the world now, how many imitators of what she sings, what she says, how she dresses or acts? She starts going to Kansas City Chiefs football games and suddenly girls are into NFL football.

The world has all of us on a leash pulling us first this way and then that way. It is like we are hot Jell-O, and the world is pouring us into its mold. The reality is not whether we will be conformed but only what we will be conformed to.

We are being shaped and molded under the influence of this algorithmic world, so the question becomes how are we being transformed. There are only two choices, we are

either being conformed to the world or to Jesus Christ. Either to the pattern of the old man, the old nature, or to the new man, the new nature.

Jesus Christ came into the world to take the world out of us, to make us new, to make us like Him, to be transformed. In all of the things we are doing and watching and imitating is it making us more like Jesus or more like the world?

Don't miss the significance of what Paul is saying here. Everything we do either helps us love God and His Word more or it draws us away.

Do you think you are beyond the possibility of making shipwreck of your faith? "Let him who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall!"

Be not conformed to this world. *How?* By being transformed by the renewing of our mind. *Why?* So we can know what is good and acceptable and perfect and true and beautiful and pure and clean and excellent and truly worthwhile.

"It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased" (C. S. Lewis)

Implications and application.

How can we find wisdom in a smartphone world?

First, acknowledge you are being influenced, acknowledge that technology is not just a neutral tool, but it is shaping us, leading us somewhere.

Along with the good it does, technology is also promoting sin, lust, greed, arrogance, anger, division, self-seeking, manipulating the truth, and drawing us further into all manner of addictions.

Second, we then have to wake up and take back control. Discipline ourselves, limit our screen time, take long breaks from it, turn off recommended algorithms and notifications and remove the apps that are your biggest distractions and time wasters.

Know your sin and your vulnerabilities and temptations. Take control of the tools rather than letting the tools control you. At the end of the day are you a better person for what you did all day with technology or are you worse for it?

“Where your heart is, there your technology will be also.”

In this age of technology it is more important than ever to cultivate spiritual habits, to connect with God and spiritual reality, with that is true, eternal, lasting, with what gives joy and peace.

Be transformed by the Word and Spirit so that you will be able to figure out what is God’s best way and then to actually want to follow that way. Pray for this, strive for this. Press on toward this. Give yourself to prayer and Scripture. How about instead of being under the influence of the world, you become the influencer under the influence of God and His Word and Spirit. Give yourself to whatever makes you wise.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Think about your eternal soul, what are you doing to it, what are you feeding it?

We live in an evil age and it takes wisdom to discern the evil and resist the evil. We may not be able to stop the evil in the world, but we can stop the evil in our world.

Genesis 1 tells us God created us to take dominion over our world, to seize control. This applies to technology. Take dominion over it, don’t blindly submit yourself to it.

Master your devices or they will master you. Dictate to it your limits and boundaries or it will be your dictator. Negotiate with technology, dominate it, rule it, make rules for it.
(Parents)

Don’t be a passive consumer of every new thing. Be an actively engaged Christian guided by Scripture and your conscience captive to the Word of God so you can make wise, God-honoring choices and decisions.

Don’t let Jesus be just an app on the smartphone of your life. Make Him the operating system on which everything else depends and through which everything is filtered.

So, whether you text, tweet, post, like, chat, click or just watch, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Prayer: Holy Father, in our battle with the world, our own flesh and the devil, give us wisdom and power from your Holy Spirit to stand and resist and not go down in defeat in this spiritual battle. Give us your victory for your glory. In Jesus name, Amen.