THE
TECH-WISE
FAMILY

Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place

ANDY CROUCH

With new insights and research from Barna

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Contents

Foreword

AMY CROUCH

As the author's daughter, I've been living with tech-wise parenting for sixteen years. Some might say my older brother, who's had it for nineteen years, would be even better qualified to write this foreword. I, however, would argue that as test subject number two, I've enjoyed an even more refined approach. So if you are wondering how tech-wise parenting actually works out, I might be able to help you.

I think the best part of tech-wise parenting, for me, has been its focus on "something older and better than the newest thing." The key word is *better*. Tech-wise parenting isn't simply intended to eliminate technology but to put better things in its place. Technology promises that it can provide wonder. Take a picture with the proper filters and you'll be

awestruck—it will look better than real life! But this promise is deceptive. My iPhone's wonder generators, from Instagram to Temple Run, turn out to be only distractions from the things that really spark wonder. Thanks to tech-wise parenting, I've discovered a world out there that is better than anything technology can offer—as close as our front lawn.

I'll be honest, though. If you're hoping that being tech wise will neatly eliminate technology's harmful influences from your children's lives, you're set up for disappointment. I haven't been totally able to escape its pitfalls. I probably have a healthier relationship with technology than some of my peers, but I still have problems—aimlessly scrolling through websites and apps even when I need to do important things (such as sleep, eat, do homework, or make cookies). And having a comparatively healthy relationship isn't much of an accomplishment, given what I'm comparing it to. I'll probably be figuring out how to balance technology and productivity through my whole adult life, and I doubt even the most tech-wise parenting could prevent that.

Tech-wise parenting has added wonder to my life, though, and that's enough. The real world is so fantastic that getting a taste of it makes even the most jaded kid want more. Not only have I always known that wonder is out there; I've been taught how to search for it. No multitude of glowing rectangles will ever be able to replace a single bumblebee. And that's the real legacy of tech-wise parenting for me. It has shown me where to look for what I need most. Wonder

comes from opening your eyes wider, not bringing the screen closer.

If you're worrying that not having a TV will wreak havoc on your child's life, don't worry. Well, maybe it will wreak havoc, but it'll be the good kind. I did end up drawing on the bathroom wall with neon green crayons meant only for the tub, but I also learned to paint tiny watercolors (we still have them in the tiny boxes violin rosin comes in), wrote songs about cows in the car (Mom still has the recording), and came up with stories about umbrella-fencing matches (I thought that was a brilliant idea as a kid and still hope to sneak an umbrella-fencing scene into a movie someday).

OK, my parents' approach to parenting has caused a certain amount of havoc and even difficulty. But since that's not the best way to persuade you to buy the book, call it *flourishing* instead. Tech-wise parenting welcomes the mud, the crayon drawings on the wall, and the arguments, because it takes some messiness to flourish. After all, the creativity that makes a kid think the wall is her canvas also encourages her to sing cow songs—and to learn the violin.

Preface

The Proper Place

Of the many things I suspect my children will both thank me for and spend years in therapy recovering from, the phrase *proper place* is probably near the top of the list.

On the spectrum from cleanness-obsessed neat freak to junk-tolerant compulsive hoarder, I'm definitely at the neatness end. So as soon as our children were old enough to understand the phrase, I started drilling into them the idea that at the end of each day, or at least once a week—OK, well, at least when friends were coming over—the flotsam and jetsam of our family life should all be put back in its "proper place."

In a kind of demented version of musical chairs, we'd queue up ten minutes' worth of music and target one part of our home. At the end of ten minutes, everything that was out of place needed to be put back or, if its proper place was in another part of the house, put in a laundry basket commandeered for that purpose. Anything that was not in its

place or in the laundry basket by the time the music stopped was to be summarily thrown in the trash. In the last moments before the music stopped, out-of-place books, homework papers, and beloved stuffed animals would all dangle menacingly over the trash can, to be rescued (most of the time) by laughing—or shrieking—children.

My "proper place" game, like so much in parenting young children, walked a fine line between effective and ruthless. More cleanup got done in ten minutes of music-fueled, trash-can-threatened frenzy than in days of halfhearted reminders. And at the end, Dad got a clean house, the stuffed animals were safely back in the bedrooms, and the children were only slightly traumatized. Of course, I never made good on my threats to put anything of real value in the trash—though the difference between what I and my children considered "of real value" will no doubt be further material for those future therapy sessions.

This book is about how to find the proper place for technology in our family lives—and how to keep it there. If only it were as simple as cleaning up a bunch of stuffed animals. Technology is literally everywhere in our homes—not only the devices in our pockets but the invisible electromagnetic waves that flood our homes. This change has come about overnight, in the blink of an eye in terms of human history and culture.

When previous generations confronted the perplexing challenges of parenting and family life, they could fall back on wisdom, or at least old wives' tales, that had been handed

down for generations. But the pace of technological change has surpassed anyone's capacity to develop enough wisdom to handle it. We are stuffing our lives with technology's new promises, with no clear sense of whether technology will help us keep the promises we've already made.

That sense of overwhelmed uncertainty applies to the author of this book and to my own family. I can't possibly tell you how to handle the new app that your fifteen-year-old will want to install on her phone next week. I don't even know, honestly, how to handle all the technology my family and I already have (and I'm a certified geek who has loved technology ever since my dad brought home a "computer terminal" and modem in the 1970s—kids, ask your grandparents what those were).

But I do know this: if we don't learn to put technology, in all its forms, in its proper place, we will miss out on many of the best parts of life in a family. I've had the incredible, perplexing, and rewarding joy of parenting two children through the teenage years with my wife, Catherine—who is, by the way, a scientist who builds extraordinary technology in her lab and yet is incredibly sane in her lack of obsession with technology at home. As our children leave high school, we realize how much of the joy that we've experienced along the way, and know today, has come from the radical choices and commitments we made to keep technology in its proper place.

We haven't always made the right choices, and it hasn't always been easy. Some of what I'll share in this book comes

from friends and mentors who had much more insight than we did, and much more courage. A lot of it is informed by our Christian faith, which gives us the clearest way we know of understanding who we really are and who, by grace, we are meant to be. What it all adds up to is a set of nudges, disciplines, and choices that can keep technology in its proper place—leaving room for the hard and beautiful work of becoming wise and courageous people together. Indeed, becoming wise and courageous is what family is really about—and it is what this book is really about, too.

This book wouldn't exist without my friends David, Roxanne, and their team at Barna Group, who urged me to write it and have been essential companions in the process. The researchers at Barna have been studying our culture, among youth and adults, for years. As we talked about what they were learning from both parents and teenagers, we realized that families have few more pressing needs than for guidance about how to handle the devices that have colonized our homes and our attention. One of the things I most admire about Barna Group is their commitment both to tell the truth about how we actually live and what we actually believe, and also to offer guidance for people who want something different from, and better than, the statistical average.

So the Barna team set out to document the role technology actually plays in American families and the concerns that both parents and children have about it. This new research

is presented in these pages, with findings that are sometimes encouraging, sometimes unsettling, and always illuminating. Sometimes survey research can be used, subtly or overtly, as a form of peer pressure—see, everybody is doing it! But if there's one thing our children need to hear from us, over and over again, it's this: "Our family is different." Throughout this book you'll get a picture, from the graphs, charts, and sidebars, of the current reality of technology and family life, and a vision, from the text, of what could be a better way.

The proper place for technology won't be exactly the same for every family, and it is not the same at every season of our lives. One of my happy memories from my early twenties is of watching *Star Trek: The Next Generation* every Tuesday night with my roommate, Steve, cracking jokes at the plot twists and fighting over the chunks of cookie dough in the quart of Ben & Jerry's ice cream we consumed during the show each week. Twenty-five years later, given my other priorities, cotton-candy entertainment like *Star Trek* doesn't have a proper place in my weekly schedule—and a weekly half quart of premium ice cream definitely doesn't have a place in my waistline! In my twenties I could consume both, happily, and not have them interfere with my core callings and commitments.

So figuring out the proper place for technology in our particular family and stage of life requires discernment rather than a simple formula. Even the ten commitments in this book are meant to be starting points for discussion—and as

you will read, they are ones my own family has kept fitfully at best. But almost anything is better than letting technology overwhelm us with its default settings, taking over our lives and stunting our growth in the ways that really matter. And I think there are some things that are true at every stage of life:

Technology is in its proper place when it helps us bond with the real people we have been given to love. It's out of its proper place when we end up bonding with people at a distance, like celebrities, whom we will never meet.

Technology is in its proper place when it starts great conversations. It's out of its proper place when it prevents us from talking with and listening to one another.

Technology is in its proper place when it helps us take care of the fragile bodies we inhabit. It's out of its proper place when it promises to help us escape the limits and vulnerabilities of those bodies altogether.

Technology is in its proper place when it helps us acquire skill and mastery of domains that are the glory of human culture (sports, music, the arts, cooking, writing, accounting; the list could go on and on). When we let technology replace the development of skill with passive consumption, something has gone wrong.

Technology is in its proper place when it helps us cultivate awe for the created world we are part of and responsible

for stewarding (our family spent some joyful and awe-filled hours when our children were in middle school watching the beautifully produced BBC series *Planet Earth*). It's out of its proper place when it keeps us from engaging the wild and wonderful natural world with all our senses.

Technology is in its proper place only when we use it with intention and care. If there's one thing I've discovered about technology, it's that it doesn't stay in its proper place on its own; much like my children's toys and stuffed creatures and minor treasures, it finds its way underfoot all over the house and all over our lives. If we aren't intentional and careful, we'll end up with a quite extraordinary mess.

So consider this short book a bit like those ten-minute cleanup sessions I put my children through: a ruthless guide to sorting out where technology actually belongs in our homes and lives, and keeping it there. Like my kids, at certain points you may squeal in alarm as I seem about to throw away one of your most treasured possessions. But we'll get through it together, and at the end we might be a couple steps closer to the life we actually want—for ourselves, our children, and our children's children.

THE TECHNOLOGY-TROUBLED FAMILY

Parents believe raising kids today is more complicated than it was when they were kids.

44%	34%	14%	5%	3%
STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
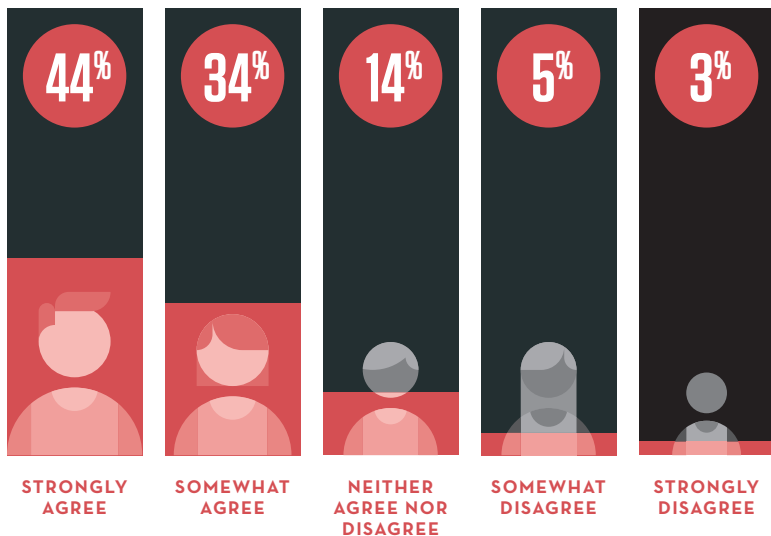
So, what is it that makes technology so challenging as a parent?
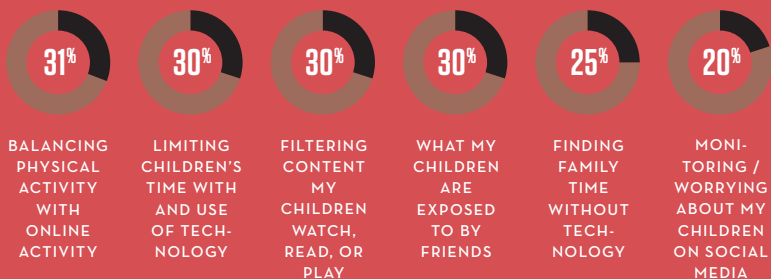
31%	30%	30%	30%	25%	20%
BALANCING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY WITH ONLINE ACTIVITY	LIMITING CHILDREN'S TIME WITH AND USE OF TECH-NOLOGY	FILTERING CONTENT MY CHILDREN WATCH, READ, OR PLAY	WHAT MY CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED TO BY FRIENDS	FINDING FAMILY TIME WITHOUT TECH-NOLOGY	MONI-TORING / WORRYING ABOUT MY CHILDREN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Why do they think parenting today is more difficult? Technology tops the list.

- 12%
- **65%** 1.
- 16% 6.
- **26%** 4.
- **52%** 2.
- **40%** 3.
- 15% 7.
- **20%** 5.
- 9% 9.
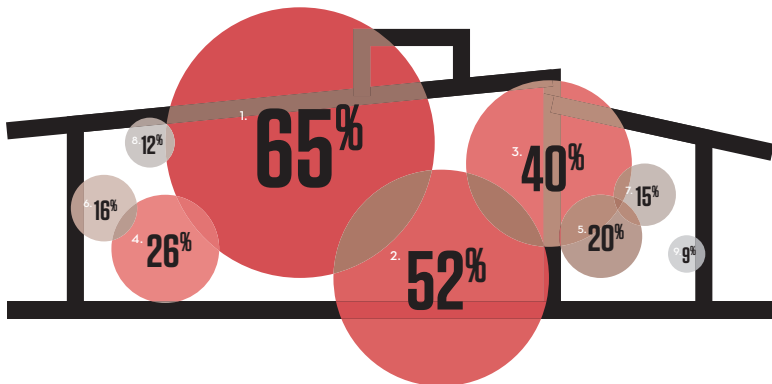
1. TECHNOLOGY / SOCIAL MEDIA

2. THE WORLD IS MORE DANGEROUS

3. LACK OF A COMMON MORALITY

4. FINANCIAL FACTORS

5. BULLYING AT SCHOOL

6. HIGH ACADEMIC PRESSURE

7. MY (OR SPOUSE'S) WORK IS MORE DEMANDING

8. LIVING FAR AWAY FROM FAMILY

9. AN EXPOSURE TO CULTURAL/ RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

18% ACCESS TO PORNOG- RAPHY

15% KEEPING UP TO DATE WITH WHAT TECH OR SOCIAL MEDIA MY CHILDREN ARE USING

15% MODELING HOW TO USE TECH WELL FOR MY CHILDREN

14% ONLINE BULLYING OR PRESSURE ON MY CHILDREN

8% MY CHILDREN "SEXTING" OR SENDING INAPPRO- PRIATE MESSAGES

2% OTHER

11% NONE OF THE ABOVE
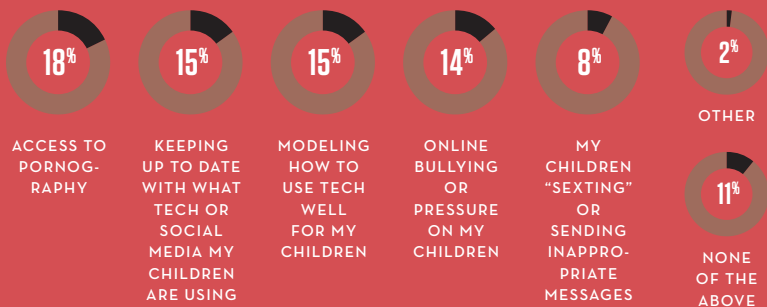
Introduction

Help!

If there is one word that sums up how many of us feel about technology and family life, it's *Help!*

Parents know we need help.

We love the way devices make our lives easier amid the stress and busyness that fill our days. We love the way screens can, almost magically, absorb our children's attention and give us a few moments of quiet in the car or before dinner. We admire the ease with which our children master technology, the prowess they show with video games, the bursts of creativity in the arts, movies, and music that devices help them produce.

But we also sense the precious days of childhood are passing by, far too fast, in a haze of ghostly blue light. We watch as the inevitable intensity of teenage relationships is raised to near-toxic levels by a sleep-depriving, round-the-clock deluge

Technology Is the Number One Reason Parents Believe Raising Kids Today Is More Complicated Than in the Past

Raising kids today is more complicated than it was when I was a kid.

- ■ strongly agree
- ■ somewhat agree
- ■ neither agree nor disagree
- ■ somewhat disagree
- ■ strongly disagree

n = 1,021 US parents of children ages 4 to 17

5% 3%

14%

44%

34%
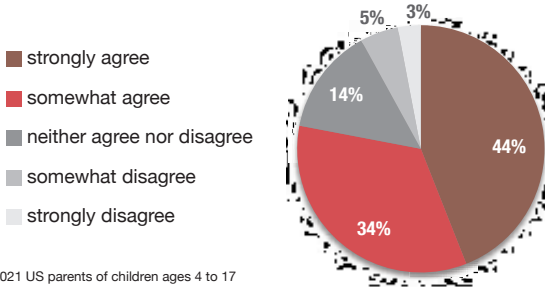
of messages. We feel helpless to prevent them from over-exposure, far too early, to the most violent and intimate facts of life. (Medieval Jewish rabbis, it's said, used to discourage anyone under thirty from even reading the Bible's poetically erotic Song of Songs. If only *that* was our problem.)

Parents feel out of control, hopelessly overmatched by the deluge of devices. And we can't even count on one another to back us up. Parents who set limits on their children's use of technology often experience intense peer pressure—from other parents!

The kids know we need help too.

They see how addicted their own parents are to devices. Apple introduced the groundbreaking iPhone in 2007. An awful lot of children born in 2007, turning ten years old as this book is published, have been competing with their

What makes it more difficult to raise kids today?

technology / social media	65%
world is more dangerous	52%
lack of common morality	40%
financial factors	26%
bullying at school	20%
high academic pressure	16%
my (or spouse's) work is more demanding	15%
living far away from family	12%
exposure to cultural/ religious diversity	9%

n = 780 US parents who agree raising kids today is more difficult

parents' screens for attention their whole lives. They see their parents tethered to their laptops, trying to stay ahead of work that has spilled out of the office into evenings and weekends. Older kids know the sick-to-the-stomach feeling of having binged on a video game for days on end (just as their parents know that queasy too-much-Netflix feeling). They've watched as their most media-savvy peers, the ones with a thousand followers from their high school or a million followers from all over the world, first expose themselves, then overexpose themselves, and go from reveling in the attention to breaking under the weight of others' expectations and derision.

To be a child, teenager, or young adult these days is to have to navigate a minefield of potentially life-altering choices, often with strangely little guidance from older adults, who are, after all, glued to their own screens.

They know there must be a better way.

And the grandparents? They aren't necessarily free of their own overdependence on technology, but I've heard more distress about our current technological addictions from grandparents than anyone else. They love their grandchildren—and, with slightly less infatuation, their children—and want to spend time with them, not just as young children but as middle schoolers, high schoolers, and beyond. But they see their grandchildren absorbed in their devices, preoccupied with popular entertainment and chatter with their peers, just when they could be having the time of their—and their grandparents'—lives. The grandparents most of all may know we need help.

Almost Almost Amish

There is a better way. It doesn't require us to become Amish, entirely separating ourselves from the modern technological world, and it doesn't require us to deny the real benefits that technology provides our families and our wider society. But let me be direct and honest: this better way is radical. It requires making choices that most of our neighbors aren't

making. It requires making choices that most of our neighbors *in church* aren't making.

Let me put it this way: you don't have to become Amish, but you probably have to become closer to Amish than you think.

This better way involves radically recommitting ourselves to what family is about—what real life is about. Our homes aren't meant to be just refueling stations, places where we and our devices rest briefly, top up our charge, and then go back to frantic activity. They are meant to be places where the very best of life happens. No matter what advertising says (even those beautiful, tear-jerking Apple ads), the very best of life has almost nothing to do with the devices we buy. It has a lot to do with the choices we make, choices that our devices often make more difficult.

The good news is that it is absolutely, completely possible to make different choices about technology from the default settings of the world around us. I've seen other families do it—I'll tell some of their stories in this book—and my wife, Catherine, and I have done it, along with the (mostly!) enthusiastic participation of our children, Timothy and Amy (nineteen and sixteen years old as this book is published). I'll tell you about the bumps in the road along the way, for sure, but the main thing we all want you to know is that it is possible to love and use all kinds of technology but still make radical choices to prevent technology from taking over our lives.

Our family is radical, but we are definitely not Amish—although we love to eat the fruit, vegetables, meat, and cheese produced by our Amish neighbors forty miles away in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We find much to admire and learn from in the way they live with one another, their animals, and the land. As Nancy Sleeth puts it in the title of her wonderful book about a life lived in conscious resistance to technology's default settings, maybe you should call us "almost Amish."[1]

Or maybe "almost almost Amish." The number of Apple devices we collectively own is easily in double digits, and in the basement there's a pretty sweet TV, purchased just before those gorgeous plasma screens were phased out.

We eat home-cooked meals most nights, often by candle-light, which no one loves more than our kids (there is always an intense competition to be the one who lights the candles). On the other hand, the very night I type these words, my daughter and I shared a microwaved dinner—and a great conversation about her new semester at school.

We benefit from all kinds of devices, but we don't build our lives around them. We haven't eliminated devices from our lives by any means, but we go to great lengths to prevent them from taking over our lives.

Here's an example of that almost-almost-Amish approach: We chose not to have a TV at all in our house until our children reached double digits (more about that later). But we did buy that pretty sweet TV I mentioned when my daughter

was ten. Eighteen months later, a friend who knew of our unusual lifestyle emailed me to ask how adding a TV was turning out.

"Amy," I asked, "how has having a TV changed our lives?"

She barely looked up from the book she was reading and said vaguely, "Do we have a TV?"

Build your life around not having a TV, and when you finally do have a TV, almost nothing will change.

Four Areas Emerge as Most Challenging for Parents

What are the most difficult things about family life and raising children?

Select up to three.

discipline	34%
time management	34%
helping my children develop good moral character	34%
monitoring technology and social media use	33%
time for healthy relationship with my spouse	24%
time for personal priorities and activities outside work or home	23%
building good relationships with my children	20%
conflict management	17%
navigating parenting differences with my spouse	13%
other	3%
none of these	3%

n = 1,021 US parents of children ages 4 to 17

Start to put the commitments in this book into practice, and if you have kids old enough to form the word "no," let alone to hack their way through the internet firewall, they will probably complain, loudly, for two weeks. *You* will complain, for two weeks. But very soon, you'll wonder why you ever waited this long to pursue the real life you were made for.

The Value of the Nudge

We didn't just hold off on buying a TV for our kids' sake. I find TV's moving images nearly irresistible. This is a problem in America, because in an awful lot of public places and homes, there's an awful lot of TV. If there is a screen in view, I'll find myself following a college basketball game, or, for that matter, local-car-dealer advertisements, with far keener attention than I'm giving to the person right across from me.

So I make it a practice to find a seat where I simply can't see a screen. I know I'm not capable of resisting the urge to watch, so I remove the temptation whenever I can, especially when there's a person with me who deserves my full attention. (That, of course, describes every single person who's ever been willing to share a meal with me.)

I suppose that I could try to change my own mental circuitry—perhaps through a program of desensitization, watching so many local-car-dealer ads that I lose interest in seeing another. Or I could try to build up my willpower or my

ability to concentrate on a conversation in spite of distractions. Those would be worthy goals, and they might become necessary if screens become even more unavoidable. But to achieve that level of inner transformation would require time and effort. For now, I can almost always settle for simply sitting where no screens are in sight. It's a simple, low-friction decision that has made countless hours at friends' homes and at restaurants much more meaningful and memorable than they would have been otherwise. You might call it a *nudge.*

As popularized in Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's fascinating book by the same name, nudges are small changes in the environment around us that make it easier for us to make the choices we want to make or want others to make.[2] Nudges don't generally *make* us do anything, but they make certain choices easier and more likely. They don't focus so much on changing anything about our own preferences and ability to choose well; they simply put the best choice right in front of us and make the wrong choice harder. An increasing body of psychological research suggests that our supply of willpower—the ability to make hard decisions that go against our instincts or preferences—is limited. Nudges help us make some of those right decisions without having to use up that precious limited supply of willpower, leaving it available for the moments when we really need it.

The world around us is nudging us all the time. Restaurants arrange their buffet lines with the salad and soup (which

cost the restaurant very little) ahead of the roast beef (which costs a lot). Grocery stores put the chips and soda (with their high profit margin) right in front of us as we shop, and they put the milk and eggs (which are often sold at a loss) at the back of the store. If an employer wants employees to contribute to a retirement plan, the participation rate goes up dramatically simply by asking them to opt out of the plan rather than opt in.

My wife, Catherine, who thinks a lot about how to get all of our family eating more healthy food, puts salad on the dinner table almost every night. I think it's fair to say that none of the rest of us, if salad were missing, would get up to go look for it (something we regularly do for ice cream). But with it sitting on the table, and with Mom passing it around, most nights we eat it. She doesn't insist, but she does nudge.

The makers of technological devices have become absolute masters at the nudge. Every notification that comes in on your smartphone is a nudge—not a command or demand, but something that makes it easier to stop whatever you're currently doing and divert your attention to your screen. Increasingly sophisticated algorithms help apps manage the number of nudges so you never get tired of responding to them. The mere presence of your smartphone in your pocket is a nudge, a gentle reminder that just a tap away are countless rewards of information, entertainment, and distraction. If you sit down on your couch and the TV remote is sitting in

front of you, inviting you to press the power button and see what's on—that's a nudge. The TV itself is a nudge—if it weren't there at all, you'd have to go somewhere else (maybe out to dinner!) to watch a game or a sitcom or, for that matter, car-dealer ads. But with it sitting right there, it's easy to make the choice to stay put and turn it on.

We are continually being nudged by our devices toward a set of choices. The question is whether those choices are leading us to the life we actually want. I want a life of conversation and friendship, not distraction and entertainment; but every day, many times a day, I'm nudged in the wrong direction. One key part of the art of living faithfully with technology is setting up better nudges for ourselves.

Disciplines and Choices

Nudges, however, will never be enough. Nudges play to our weakness—our tendency to take the easy road most taken. They change the environment outside us in order to make good choices easier. But nudges will never, on their own, build the wisdom and courage we need—partly because we often can't control our environment, no matter how much we'd like to. We need to change something inside of us as well: to develop the strength to make good choices even when everything around us is nudging, or pushing, us in the wrong direction. And for that we need *disciplines*.

Disciplines are very much like what weight lifters call *progressive overload*. The best way to gain strength is by pushing your muscles to the very edge of their current capacity, for a relatively brief time. No one can spend twelve hours a day bench-pressing hundreds of pounds, and no one should want to. But spend an hour a day, a few days a week, in that kind of focused, strenuous exertion, and you will see gains in strength that come no other way, strength that will then be available for everything else you do. The point of working out is not just to be able to complete more reps with higher weight a few times a week—it's to develop and train our bodies to be healthier all the time. (Indeed, it seems that regular strength training, by building muscle tissue, helps us burn more calories even when we are sitting still!)[3]

This is how spiritual disciplines work as well. The central disciplines of the spiritual life, as taught by generations of Christian saints, have stayed the same for twenty centuries now: solitude, silence, and fasting. Each of them pushes us beyond our natural limits, and all of them give us spiritual resources for everyday life that we can't gain any other way.

Very few of us, for example, are meant to spend our lives largely alone, but the person who has not experienced or cannot bear *solitude* is missing an essential part of maturity. ("Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. . . . Let him who is not in community beware of being alone"—Dietrich Bonhoeffer.)[4] We are not meant for perpetual silence—we are meant to listen and speak. But the person who has not

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experienced or cannot bear *silence* does not understand what they hear and has little to offer when they speak. And of course we are meant to eat, and even to feast, but only when we *fast* do we make real progress toward being free of our dependence on food to soothe our depression and anesthetize our anxieties.

The disciplines, by taking us to our very limits, gradually move those limits. They move us toward being the kinds of people we were meant to be and want to be. So the discipline of Sabbath, for example, doesn't just help us take one day a week to enjoy deep and restorative rest (with all the preparation, concentration, and commitment that requires); it helps us make choices the rest of the week to avoid anxiety and pride.

The most powerful choices we will make in our lives are not about specific decisions but about patterns of life: the nudges and disciplines that will shape all our other choices. This is especially true with technology. Technology comes with a powerful set of nudges—the default settings of our "easy-everywhere" culture. Because technology is devoted primarily to making our lives easier, it discourages us from disciplines, especially ones that involve disentangling ourselves from technology itself.

If we want a better life, for ourselves and for our families, we will have to choose it—and the best way to choose it is to nudge and discipline ourselves toward the kind of life we most deeply want. We'll arrange the places we live and the patterns

of our daily lives to make the best choice easier. And because the best choice often requires strength and courage, we'll build in periods of intense effort or demanding withdrawal that help us make the right choice when it's not easy at all.

So Here's the Plan

The rest of this book is about the commitments we can make toward that better life. I've suggested "ten commitments" for a healthy family life with technology—one in each of the following chapters. The ten commitments are definitely not the same as the Ten Commandments! Even though I recommend each one wholeheartedly, you'll discover as you read that our family has not kept all of them equally well. (Though the same is true, it occurs to me, with the Ten Commandments.) Your family may choose to emphasize a few of these commitments more than others, and perhaps to set one or two aside—and there may be other commitments that are important for your family that are not covered here. I offer these simply as a good starting point for nudging and disciplining ourselves in a better direction.

The ten commitments begin with three choices that are especially fundamental.

The first and deepest is to *choose character*—to make the mission of our family, for children and adults alike, the cultivation of wisdom and courage.

It's a complex, rapidly changing world, and parents today are feeling it. Nearly eight in ten parents (78%) believe that they have a more complicated job in raising their kids today than their parents did raising them. Monitoring technology usage tops the list of what they perceive contributes to this difficulty. Beyond that, parents seem to most often identify issues that feel out of their control and that are global in scope: a more dangerous world or a lack of a common morality. The consequences of these difficulties feel dire and so, perhaps, scare parents more than local or personal factors such as finances, bullying at school, or high academic pressures.

The second is to *shape space*—to make choices about the place where we live that put the development of character and creativity at the heart of our home.

And the third is to *structure time*—to build rhythms into our lives, on a daily, weekly, and annual basis, that make it possible for us to get to know one another, God, and our world in deeper and deeper ways.

So we'll begin, in the first part of the book, with those three basic choices, the foundation for everything else.

In the second part, we'll look at some nudges and disciplines we can put in place every day to have a healthier life with technology, from the moment we wake up until the end of the day.

And in the third part, we'll look at the two biggest tasks we were made for: to worship God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to care for one another at our most

vulnerable—at our birth, at our times of great sickness, and at our death.

This book is about much more than just social media, or even screens. It's about how to live as full, flourishing human beings. Maybe it will even turn out that in that quest for flourishing, technology in its proper place can actually help.