Technology, The Future & The Church

How technology is changing the way we do church and what we can do about it….

The Challenge

- A young pastor graduating from bible college today may be still ministering in the world of 2050 – but we are still training them for the world of 1950!

- We are still using the frameworks of:
  *The local parish church
  *The 1950's nuclear family structure
  * Lifelong denominational affiliation
  *A certain "standard" set of pastoral problems

- In a world that is now mobile, urbanized, multi-cultural, globalized, fragmented, and awash in powerful technology that is their primary source of information.

- And which is facing significant future challenges from bio-technology, information technology, and a whole new way of "being connected" (to both good and evil).

- There are a whole new set of pastoral problems that just "weren't there" in 1950!!

Technology Is Changing Pastoring

* Some current technology issues:
* Information overload
* Pornography addiction
* The 'always connected' youth
* People who live their whole life playing video games or who dwell in a virtual reality world
* Satanic online games / role playing
* "Church" on Facebook / Internet
* Cult recruitment online
* False doctrine online
* Privacy issues, scams,
* Internet dating & cyberspace contribution to marriage breakdown

Technology & Your Church

- 85% of young people will check your church website before even considering visiting your building
- Your people are getting their doctrine online and are keeping up with prophecy and world events online
- Your people are getting pastoral advice and counsel online
- Your people are getting their worship music and having their worship experience online
- Your people are doing their private thinking online: about medical issues, politics, the Bible, spirituality, about ¼ of people get saved online
- People are making their commitments online: to a church, mission, bible college, who to give their tithe to, or even who to marry.

Don't Be An Ostrich!

- "This is too difficult, I will just ignore it, besides Jesus is coming soon, so I will just wait for the Rapture…"
- BUT the problem is ALREADY HERE…..
- 37% of pastors are struggling with Internet pornography
- Many divorces now involve pornography as a factor (2/3??) and "Internet affairs"
- False doctrine is rampant
- Money for the Kingdom is being siphoned off by scams
- The "ostrich response" is a very poor model
- The "ostrich" response is like the shepherd ignoring the wolf!

Possible Issues in 2025…

- How do you pastor a human clone?

- How do you even get people to a church building when they can "do a church service" in a virtual reality environment

- How do you pastor people who are hyper-sexualized from childhood and have ready access to powerful sexual stimuli?

- How do you share Christ in a world of universal surveillance?

- What if the gerontologists are right and we will all soon be living over 100 and possibly to 120 or even more?
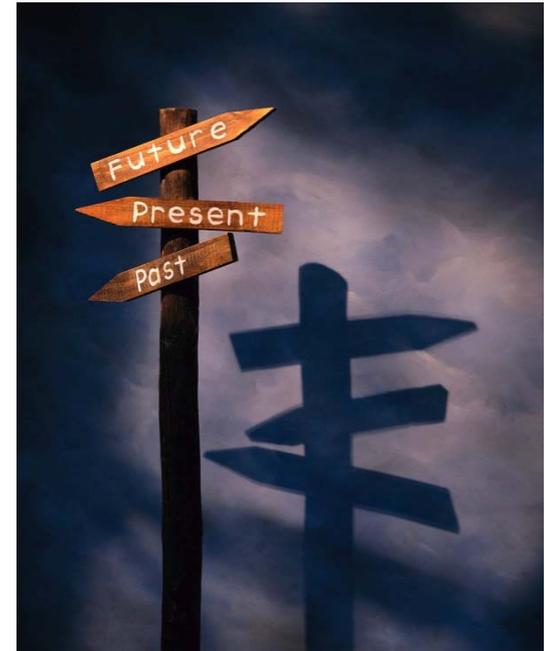
Good Technology

- The first Spirit-filled person in the Bible was a craftsman – Bezalel who built the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 31 & 36)

- Jesus was a carpenter and so using tools and creating objects must not be sinful.

- Ezekiel's vision of God dwelling above "the wheels" of a huge spiritual machine "for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels" (Ezek. 1)

- Good craftsmanship is always praised in the Bible because God gives wisdom and diligence to people so they can apply it.

- Technology can be used for good purposes such as construction, medicine, crisis relief etc.

- Good technology blesses people and glorifies God "that they may have life and have it more abundantly"

Evil Technology

- However technology often arises out of rebellion e.g. Cain's descendants who became inventors and technologists.

- Evil technology includes instruments of torture, idols, massive images of dictators, and things created to deceive and enslave people. "The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy".

- The image of the Beast – "given breath" (artificial intelligence) able to speak (artificial speech) and able to kill all who do not worship it. (Rev 13:15)

- Ancient temples often had tricks to make the idol appear alive

- Evil technology creates fear and dominance and denies the existence of the Creator God so people worship the creature rather than the Creator.

How Should The Church Respond?

- **The Amish** – ban technology
- **Ostrich** – pretend it isn't there
- **Virtual Church** – churches online
- **Conspiracy Theorist** – fear technology
- **Televangelist** – for self-glorification and $
- **Consumer** – uncritical adoption
- **Madison Avenue** – make the gospel into an easy-to-communicate "product" or message, throw out the awkward and unmarketable bits. Aim for "buy-in".

A Possible Godly Response

- Maintain the message (esp. of the Cross)
- Don't oversimplify the Gospel or commercialize it
- Use some technology & use it well
- Create genuine face-to-face community
- Offer a compelling competing reality to the virtual world. Relationships!!!!
- Have a strong pro-life ethical foundation
- Know what is going on
- Fight isolation, selfishness and addiction
- Provide blocking software and other easy technological solutions, educate people on how to avoid scams etc
- Get experts (in your denomination or seminary) to teach on these issues.

Teaching On Technology

- There are no bible verses that directly talk about computers, avatars, clones etc.

- Use **passages that contain principles** about purity, addiction, foolish lifestyle choices, idolatry, identity, covetousness, discernment of good and evil etc.

- Provide big picture frameworks:
  - Cool vs. Holy; Godly Identity vs. Branding
  - The ethical use of power
  - Renewing the mind, not just filling it
  - Taking control of your lifestyle

- Teach people how to be led by the Spirit and by the voice of God speaking through the Bible and through their conscience.

- Show the consequences of their choices

- Raise the issues, talk about them, be aware
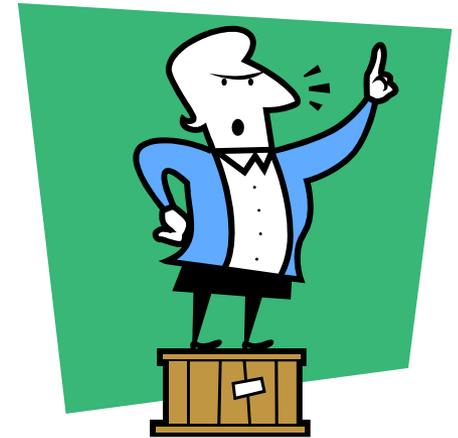
Competing With Technology

- The media and the Internet will soon totally dominate areas such as information delivery and entertainment – even in spiritual areas!

- Your people can get doctrine, bible teaching, and even "life application" from TV, radio, websites, books, DVDs, and seminars – without ever setting foot in your church!

- Churches built on "church-as-theatre": information delivery + entertainment model, will not be able to compete. A good sermon and a great worship team won't hold people for long any more

- The unique product of the local church is godly presence, the anointing, relationships, community, love, exhortation, discipleship and encouragement, & long-term emotional safety.

- Christians have loads of information but they are dying inside and are feeling lost and neglected.

One-Another-Ministry

- People are lonely, are crying out to be heard and desperately want real community

- Technology is creating vast loneliness

- The NT has 33 "one-another" commands: love one another, encourage one another, pray for one another etc.

- A church that actually "does" these commands will create disciples that can withstand temptation and will give accountability in a mixed up world.

- It will meet a real hunger and a real unmet need. Love will cause people to grow.

- Requires trust in lay leadership as this is far beyond what a pastor can do alone.

The Role Of The Bible

- The Bible as mere "spiritual information" is not working and people are not growing much from just "learning"
- The local church and relationship: the Bible in living context, spoken to people where they are at by people who love them and who pray for them.
- Inspiration not just information, Spirit and life, conviction, Living Promises.
- The Word made personal
- Biblical apologetics to clarify the mixed up belief systems that so many people have absorbed from the world.
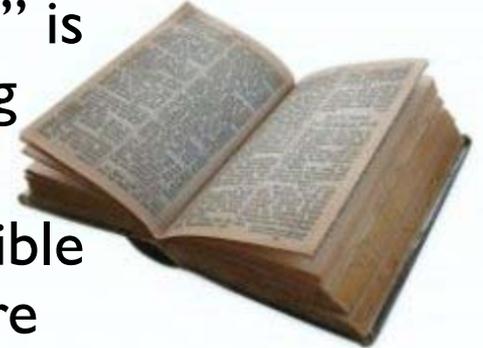
Technology That Blesses The Church

- Send out prayer points
- Validate your Church to enquirers and donors
- Assistance for the disabled in services
- Put complex church information online
- Hold discussions about church life
- Contact pastors, elders and counselors
- Advertise church events
- Network with others
- Make the local church into a global presence
- Share the gospel – locally and overseas
- Provide resources for new believers

Some Final Thoughts

- The Internet can be your fishing Net
- People don't drive around looking for churches - they Google - unless you are online you simply will not "exist"
- Up to 50% of your pastoral problems will involve their interaction with technology (at some level)
- Technology is the ocean in which your ministry will either sink or swim
- You can't ignore the avalanche
- The parish church is now the multi-cultural networked church