

The Hyperdrive Trade-off

There is a change that has taken place over the past fifty years. It seems that somehow the speed of American life has jumped into a kind of overdrive. As we become hyperconnected, overstimulated, multitasked, hyperinformed, hectically scheduled, and manically entertained, we wonder why we feel so tired at night. Our hyperdriven lives certainly allow us to accomplish and experience more than ever before, but it's quite possible that this modern lifestyle also has caused us to sacrifice more than we realize. Unfortunately, the thing we need most to examine those sacrifices is the thing we seem to have the least ability to spare: time to stop and think.

When we make the choice to kick it into overdrive (and I would contend that it is a choice), there's no doubt that we gain things and we lose things. The things we gain are clearly laid out for us on the software box, in the cell phone plan, or in the employment contract. Time-saving technology gives us the ability to do things quicker, easier, and with less mess. And although technology has its drawbacks, there's no way most of us would want to go back to a simpler 1950s, where we couldn't defrost a roast in the microwave, flip open a cell phone for directions, or use a hand-held hair dryer to put lasting bounce in our style. Simply put, a life with better technology is a life that is easier—sort of.

Unfortunately, progress is never completely straightforward. With every gain, we lose a piece of a simpler, less encumbered life. With every new gadget, we become more wired and less grounded. With every new virtual link, we lose a little bit of reality. And with every secular connection, we lose a little bit of the divine. The cost of our choices usually is less sensational than the gains and a lot harder to identify. Unfortunately, without taking the time to sort out the costs from the rewards, we will never know what we are missing or where we are heading. As countercultural as it is to even consider disconnecting, unloading, powering down, or rebooting, that may be exactly what it takes to refocus our lives in a way that brings us to a deeper understanding of who we are and who we were meant to be.

Introduction

This book is designed to help you reboot. In computer terms, rebooting is usually required after the operating system is no longer functioning the way it's supposed to. It often is accompanied by frustrating error messages, ticked-off attempts at banging unhelpful buttons, distressed calls to a help center, or threats of throwing the whole thing out the window. No, rebooting is usually not a happy thing. However, when a reboot works, the entire operating system starts running more smoothly—the way it was designed to work. Let's face it. Sometimes, our lives could use a reboot. Sometimes, we need to spend a little time powered down, thinking about how the little, everyday choices we make are altering our values, our relationships, and, most importantly, our faith. We need to figure out how our operating system has been compromised and what we need to do to fix it.

The choices I would like to focus on have to do with all the insignificant-looking ways we use communication technology to make our lives easier and more enjoyable. As many good and noble ways as there are for these gadgets to enhance our lives, it's quite possible that they also are altering our foundational operating system. We don't usually connect things such as cell phones, iPods, video games, text messages, Twitter, and e-mails with our faith, but it's quite possible that gadgets and software specifically designed to make life more efficient and entertaining have a direct impact on the depth of our Christian experience.

In other words, a life full of purpose, abundance, and profound joy may not easily fit into a Christian life inundated with technology. After all, God can work in big, loud, and efficient ways, but often God works in small, slow, and quiet ways. When we rush by or text through experiences and relationships, it is all too possible that we will completely miss the very things that God has designed specifically to give us joy and purpose. As a result, we may find ourselves skipping along the surface of spirituality with only an occasional look into the deep-running waters of a fully committed, passionate Christian life—not exactly what God had in mind. When it comes to the way we use our technology, it's quite possible that we could do a better job of using it in ways that bring us closer to what God has designed

for us. It may mean that we need to reevaluate our choices and restructure our habits. We may need to take some time to reboot.

The Hyperdrive Choice

Technology is an important topic, but I don't want to overemphasize the power it has to control us. After all, a gadget or a software package can't make us be someone we are not. When it comes down to it, our modern, high-tech lifestyle is a series of choices. From the minute we roll out of bed in the morning to the minute we lay our head on the pillow, we are faced with a series of choices of how to use our technology, how to prioritize our time, and how to treat the people around us. There's no doubt that we can be productive and efficient in a way that is also God-honoring. We can use the technology that drives our culture in a way that beautifully and creatively communicates God's love and God's hand in our lives without sacrificing important values and relationships that define our faith. But it takes work and it takes time to find the balance and the opportunities. Therefore, the first thing we need to do is to make the choice to make a choice.

I recently taught a college class on communication and technology that challenged students to become intentional about the choices they were making with their technology. One of the first things I did was require them to give up their cell phones for a week. I couldn't believe the response. I saw fire in my students' eyes—the bad kind of fire. No way could they give up their phones! Their parents might call. They couldn't talk to their friends. They would lose their connection to the world. As I thought about their concerns and how it might actually be a good thing to take a break from their parents and how they live on a residential campus with most of their closest friends no more than two minutes away, I began to realize that, regardless of the reality, they felt as though they simply didn't have a choice. To live in this culture, they had to have a cell phone. Seeking out a compromise, I then said that they could just give up sending text messages for a week. There were still some students who saw that as a non-option. No class grade was worth losing their

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texting ability.

As easy as it is to look at my students and shake my head at the way technology has twisted the thinking of today's teenagers, I can't go too far before I see that I'm tied into the very same ways of thinking. For instance, when I think about changing the way I use e-mail, the television, or my computer, it's a non-option. Give them up? No way! I need them. I simply don't have a choice, and it's just not worth it. After my classroom experience, I stopped to consider how my technology was shaping me. I found that, on one hand, I could be proud of the fact that I didn't spend hours at a time playing Grand Theft Auto or checking my Facebook account as my students do. On the other hand, I had to admit that I often labeled the act of watching a DVD in a dark room with my kids "quality time." I might not be able to type text messages behind my back during lectures like my students, but I could regularly be found checking e-mails at eleven o'clock at night from my dining room table.

Somewhere, and at some time, I had a choice. I had a choice about how I would use my technology to make my life better. But when that choice became critical, I didn't stop to take the time to think about the way my technology was changing me. And as the technology became more integrated into the way I live, it moved from being a fun gadget to an absolute essential. Technology has a way of changing our lives in small increments, each one overshadowing the choice we may have had to go back to how it was before.

Integrated and Intentional Hyperdrive

In so many ways, technology is changing us. It subtly takes away our choices, and it changes what we value most. Here's a challenge for you to think about as you begin reading this book: Do you have control over the way you use technology? Do you see how your choice of communicating with others may be drawing you closer or taking you further from the excitement and focus of living out your calling? Is it possible that God has got something far more exhilarating for you than what our culture has to offer through virtual relationships and high-speed connections? Have you been paying attention to the

choices you make?

It is my hope that this book will help you begin the process of identifying how you are using technology. I will explore three areas where I see how our unexamined choices regarding technology may unintentionally be altering our fundamental operating system. They include our values, relationships, and the way we view our Creator. While I believe that it is important to examine negative ways in which technology may be impacting us, my ultimate goal is to help you use technology well. I would like to inspire you to creatively and intentionally balance high-tech benefits with the demands of a decidedly no-tech God. Hopefully, it will get you brainstorming about new ways to experience the Christian life with or without high-tech gadgetry. Hopefully, it will help you figure out how to reboot your current habits and refresh your fundamental commitments. At the very least, I hope that it will motivate you to stop and think.

Shift

1. Make a list of the pieces of technology that you use the most.
2. For each technology listed, consider why you started using it in the first place. Has its role changed since you started using it? If you wanted to give it up, could you?
3. For each piece of technology, list one thing that you “lose” when you choose to use it. Then brainstorm one or two ways you could readjust things to turn that loss into a gain.

Esc

Spend some time right now praying over your use of technology. Go through each thing on your list and quietly pray that God would open your heart and tune in your mind to how that gadget or website might be changing you. Then, one by one, give control over that piece of technology to God.