Musings on Modern Technology

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Preacher: Dr. Craig Gay

[0:00] As you can tell by my title, I'm going to be talking about technology. And when I say musings, I didn't pick that word, that wasn't my word, musings.

But I think maybe this will be musings about technology, because I'm not quite sure what to think about it myself yet. I'm working away on this, I've been working on this problem or this issue of technology for years, trying to understand it.
Questions like, you know, is the impact of the technology that we're surrounded by, this sort of thing, or my iPhone, the computer, email, Facebook, all of this stuff, is this good or not?
How should we think about it? How do we live with it? How do we make the best of it? I mean, to use Castile Olof's title for next week.
Now, what I want to do briefly this morning is I want to introduce you to a fellow named Albert Borgman, who is, I think, one of the most helpful living philosophers of technology.
[1:19] Albert Borgman is now retired, but taught at the University of Montana for many years, in Missoula.

I haven't actually met him, but I know a number of people who have. And we'd love to get him to come somehow out to Vancouver and speak to us at some point. But he's written a number of really interesting books, one of which I'm going to be talking about in some detail today.
And this is the book I'd like to introduce you to today. It's called Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life.
This came out, I think it was published in 1984. No, it must be more recent than that. Let's see. Yeah, 1984.
Okay. Borgman begins, he states his thesis in this book right at the beginning.
[2:22] And I want to read it. And it's on your outline. So, I mean, the purpose of these outlines is just, I've got a number of quotations that I'd like to take us through.

And it's a lot easier, I think, rather than just listening to them to follow along with me on the sheets. Okay, this is right at the very beginning of the book. He says, the problems that beset technological societies are thought to be extrinsic to technology.
They stem, supposedly, from political indecision, social injustice, or environmental constraints, etc. I consider this to be a serious misreading of our situation. In other words, the notion that the problems that we encounter in a technological society are extrinsic, not necessarily linked to the technology itself.
He considers that to be a mistake. I propose to show that there is a characteristic and constraining pattern to the entire fabric of our lives.
[3:39] This pattern is visible first, and most of all, in the countless inconspicuous objects and procedures of daily life in a technological society.

Cell phones, automobiles, GPS units, whatever. I mean, all of these things that we're surrounded by.
This constraining pattern is concrete in its manifestations, closest to our existence, and pervasive in its extent.
The rise and the rule of this pattern I consider the most consequential event of the modern period. Once the pattern is explicated and seen, it sheds light on the hopes that have shaped our times, on the confusions and frustrations that we have suffered in our attempts to realize these hopes, and on the possibilities of clarifying our deepest aspirations, and of acting constructively on our best insights.
[4:54] Now, these are some serious claims, especially this point that he says, the rise and rule of this pattern I consider the most consequential event of the modern period.

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Well, that's quite a claim. So, let's see if we can figure out, you know, why this is. Now, Borgman is, as he mentions in the paragraph, he's critical of what you could call instrumentalist approaches to technology.
In other words, approaches that assume that technology is simply a kind of neutral tool, and that when problems arise, what needs to be done is we simply need to adjust the tool or to fix it, or to redirect it.
In other words, the problems are not embedded in technology itself, it's how the technology is used.
The problem, though, with the instrumental approach to technology is that it fails to appreciate the kind of two-ray relationship between the technological means that we employ to achieve certain purposes, and the tendency of technology to flip those around so that the purposes we were originally seeking to achieve through the use of technology are actually changed by our use of the technology.
The best sort of quip that I've heard that summarizes this two-way relationship is, Neil Postman uses it, it's, to the man with a hammer, everything begins to look like a nail.
[7:01] So, you know, just simply the use of this stuff changes the way we think about our lives and what we're doing in the world and so forth.

Now, Borgman's also critical of those like Jacques Ellul, who, I don't know if you've read Jacques Ellul, most of you probably have heard of him.
He wrote a very important book all the way back in the early 1960s called The Technological Society, and it's kind of groundbreaking work.
But Ellul leaves you with the impression that technology has become a kind of law unto itself.
It's our fate. It's irresistible, and there's really not much we can do about it.
[8:09] Not exactly an encouraging place to leave us. So, Borgman is both, he wants to be more critical of technology than most of us sort of normally are, but he doesn't want to be so critical as to leave us feeling hopeless, right?

Now, in terms of this pattern that he mentioned in that first paragraph, this constraining pattern, the problem, he thinks, is that technology biases our attention toward one particular kind of making, or one particular way of living in the world.
It focuses our attention on what he calls disembodied techniques of various kinds, and it distracts our attention from communal practices that ultimately make life worth living.
Now, the example he gives of this, which I think is quite powerful, is the example of the difference between giving a child an iPod, now he doesn't use the word iPod because they didn't have them in 1984, he gives the example of a stereo set.
Okay, so you have a choice, we can give the child a stereo set, or we can give the child a, say, violin, and lessons to learn how to play the violin.
[9:57] Now, both gifts have to do with the making of music, but they represent very different kinds of making.

The latter, in other words, giving the violin and with the lessons, because it entails years of disciplined practice and involves the student in a living tradition and interaction with the teacher and other students and so forth, the whole world of violin learning, Borgman believes it is intrinsically more valuable than the former.
It fills life up. Now, he doesn't talk much about this, but on the other hand, the first kind of gift, the gift of the stereo set or the iPod, of course that issues in music that is better, in a sense, more immediately.
And it requires very little skill, in fact, almost none. So, both of these gifts involve the making of music, but one tends to have, well, they have different impacts on our lives, different kinds of results.
Now, he suggests that for the most part today, we are opting for the former kind of gift, the former way of being in the world.
[11:44] And he's curious about this, and why do we do this to ourselves? The answer that he gives is that he believes we are enticed by an implicit promise, the implicit promise in technology, to improve our lives, to make our lives better.

So then he goes into talking about what he calls the promise of technology. Now, this promise, Borgman Fields was formulated at the very beginning of the 18th century.

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Progress through disciplined scientific reasoning, and affected by disciplined technological making, was supposed to make our lives better.
It's very much a part of what we call the Enlightenment, very much a part of the modern ethos.
What was that motto or the slogan of, Dow Chemical, I think it was, it was quote, Better Living Through Chemistry?
Yeah. That's a nice summary of it. And technology undoubtedly has made our lives better in lots and lots of ways.
[13:13] There's no question about that. But, at the same time, Borgman observes that material and technical progress has, from the very beginning, gone hand in hand with trivial and frivolous consumption.

And, ironically, technological development has not made our lives better in a number of other ways.
Now, I've got two quotes here, one from Bertrand Russell and one from Lewis Mumford.
They're both sort of wickedly ironic, but they're good. Russell made the following observation. He's talking about transportation.
Each improvement in locomotion has increased the area over which people are compelled to move, so that a person who would have had to have spent half an hour to walk to work a century ago must still spend half an hour to reach his destination today, because the contrivance that would have enabled him to save time had he remained in its original situation now has driven him to a more distant residential area, and this has effectively cancelled out the game.
In other words, we think we've made a lot of progress, right? But it still takes us an hour to get to work. Mumford says, Much of our mechanical apparatus is useful in the same way that a crutch is useful when a leg is injured.
[14:53] It's inferior to the normal functioning leg. The crutch assists its user to walk about while bone and tissue are being repaired. The common mistake is that of fancying that a society in which everyone is equipped with crutches is thereby more efficient than one in which the majority of people simply walk around on their own legs.

The classic emblem of this that came out a few years ago is this thing, what do they call them?
They're these things you stand on and they have handlebars, and you lean forward and they go.
They didn't sell well, I think they were too expensive.
But I hope that they didn't sell well also just because people realized that this is a solution to a problem that we just don't have. I mean, what is this about?
Anyway. Now, But Borgman says that this promise, this implicit promise of progress through chemistry or better living through technology or more of this technological stuff is going to make our lives better.
[16:25] But this is still very much implicit in our culture. It's still very much, it motivates us in lots of ways. So he wants to unpack this.

And he suggests that the promise of progress by means of technology is linked, first of all, with what he calls availability.
And what the thought here is that part of this promise is that it's good that more and more things will be made available to us.
And it also means that the expanded range of available things won't be a burden to us.
But rather that the newly available range of things will be relatively easy to consume and safe to use. And they all add to our lives.
[17:30] They don't subtract from them. And of course, the connection here, we won't talk about this, but there's an obvious connection here with business and the economy.

I mean, the people who make these things are obviously interested in encouraging us to want them.
And to, you know, encourage us to believe that buying these products will improve our lives in some ways.
So there's a lot of effort put into this, trying to sell these things to us. Now, here Borgman makes an interesting distinction between what he calls things and what he calls devices.
And I, this, it's an awkward use of the word thing, but a thing, Borgman writes, in the sense that I want to use the word here is inseparable from its context.
Namely, its world. And from our commerce with the thing and its world. Namely, engagement. The experience of a thing is always, and also a bodily and social engagement with the thing's world.

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[18:57] Now, there again, if we could come up with a better word for that, I think that would be good. But, he's on to something here, and he uses the example of a boat.

In this case, let's talk about a pleasure boat. A pleasure boat, really a boat of any kind, is a thing in Borgman's sense. And that is because even the simplest boat requires us to enter into its world.
In this case, it's a world of water and weather and temperatures and wind and various other things.
And because this world is complex, the world of the boat, boating requires disciplined engagement.
I mean, we're all familiar with these tragic stories of people who set out in boats without having any skill or any prior training. And, you know, they die.
Something bad happens to them. Well, they didn't, they weren't fully appreciative of the world they were entering. They failed to appropriately engage with that world, and it costs them their lives.
[20:15] Okay? Now, so, boating requires disciplined engagement. Things require this sort of engagement. They require skill. They require skill. And, you know, there's a cost that is borne by those who fail to engage in the appropriate way.

Now, a device, by contrast, requires no such engagement. It makes very few demands of us.
It requires very little skill to use. And simply supplies us, by way of machinery, with a commodity of some sort.
So, you know, something that is easily purchased, easily consumed, and easily discarded, easily replaced, and so forth. Now, the iPod is probably a great example of this.
A small child can use an iPod to make music. I mean, it requires almost nothing.
[21:33] There's like two buttons on the thing. You know? Very simple. So, this distinction.

Things, devices. Things are concrete. And although they may well have functions, they aren't describable simply in terms of their function.
Boating, to use that example again, is not just about transportation. It connotes an entire way of life. A body of knowledge. A set of skills. A community of discourse. A camaraderie. You know, and there are magazines for people like this, right?
Boaters. And you know who you are. Devices simply procure commodities.
[22:39] So, they have functional equivalents. There aren't communities of, I mean, there are technophiles. But you don't have a magazine devoted simply to iPod users.

I mean, there's not enough there to really talk about. I mean, how many articles can you write about scrolling through the menu?
Or pushing the on and off button. Anyway. Devices seek to disburden us. In other words, they go out of their way not to be obtrusive, not to make any demands of us.
The whole idea is to make the consumption of the commodity that the device provides as effortless as possible. Now, the other thing that's interesting about a device is that the underlying machinery that enables them to do this, machinery that can be very ingenious and very complicated, well, this is concealed as much as possible.
And again, I think the iPod is a perfect example of this. I mean, from the outside, it's very, very simple. Elegantly simple.
[23:58] I mean, these things are beautiful in their simplicity from the outside. But, on the other hand, we're aware that on the inside, there's a lot going on in this thing.

A lot going on that we don't understand. I can't even begin to understand what's going on. It's a marvel, really, of high technology.
And of electrical engineering and computer chips and who knows what else. But as consumers, we don't really need to know about how the device works.
Just that it does, and when it fails to do so, what do you do with it? You throw it out. You throw it out and you buy another one. You can take an iPod into a repair shop and they do the same thing.
They don't even try to fix them. It's not worth it. It would cost you more to repair it than it would just to replace it. So you throw it out.
[25:04] Now, going back once more to the example of the boat, one of the skills that you need to develop to practice safe boating is precisely to know how all of the parts of the boat work.

And, you know, even if you can't affect professional repairs on the boat, you need to know at least how to keep the thing functioning so that you get to wherever it is you want to go or you get to land without sinking or whatnot.
But again, this isn't the case with a device. Broken devices are replaced most often. Okay, so again, under the heading of availability, the device is something that promises to make our lives better,

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promises to add to our lives without requiring anything from us.
Okay. This is very much a part of modern marketing of these things and the development of consumer electronics.
I mean, that's what this is about. Modern technology's implicit promise, the implicit promise in these devices is to disburden us from, well, anything that feels burdensome.
[26:55] Now, here's the problem. And this is where Borgman's argument, I think, gets interesting.

And this disburdenment results or can result ultimately in, you know, because it requires no engagement, it can result in loneliness.
It's somehow disconnecting us from life in a way that is, it's nice at first, I suppose, but then, you know, you get to the certain point where you realize that you just, you have no skills, you have no, there's no engagement going on, there's no, there's nothing with which you are involved.
And that's, there's an emptiness in that. Borgman writes, one can trace the development that leads from a fireplace to a central heating plant, from a horse-drawn wagon to an automobile, or from a pre-technological meal to a TV dinner.
Now, do they still have TV dinners? I mean, they have, but they don't call them that anymore, do they? Better. Yeah, and they're probably better.
[28:29] I remember as a kid loving TV dinners. But, the question he asks is, okay, at the end of the day, when you get to the point of having the TV dinner on your TV tray in front of the TV, what is it that you've been liberated from?

I mean, just how has your life been made better? Is this progress? And, yeah, I mean, I'm ambivalent about this, because I think, gosh, they're pretty handy.
But, on the other hand, we have been liberated from a number of things that would have involved us in various kinds of engagement with other people, with skill, with, you know, whatnot, in terms of the making of a meal.
Now, here, Borgman's no, he's not a technophobe. He says, surely there are any number of things that are properly commodified.
And, the device paradigm, as he calls it, would be very appropriate to them. And, he mentions running water in our houses, for example.
[30:02] I mean, it's not a big loss in the fact that we don't have to go out with buckets to the common well. Maybe there is, but I'm okay with that.

I'm willing to sacrifice that. The other one is flush toilets. It's okay. It's alright. I mean, I know that I'm missing out on something. But, I don't care what it was, and I don't want to go back.
So, there are things like that, that, yeah, sure, let's use devices, let's commodify it, let's, you know, let's conceal the machinery that makes it possible.
No problem with those things. But, let's be aware that if we commodify all of our lives, all of these things and practices, then the net result will be to diminish the quality of our lives.
And, so there are things and there are practices that should not be commodified. And, Borgman calls these, again, these are awkward terms, but he calls them focal.
[31:21] Focal things and focal practices. Now, focal things and practices are those sorts of things that engage us in so many subtle ways that no quantification can capture them.

We think of, for example, a friendship. Well, I mean, the list is long. Friendship, marriage, raising kids, worship. These are all things that can't be delivered by way of devices.
And, I mean, that's one of the things we need to do is to make our list. What are the sorts of things that we're unwilling to submit to this device paradigm?
So, this, then, is the key for Borgman. He says we have to learn to distinguish between the kinds of things that can be properly commodified and delivered by way of devices, and the kinds of things that should not be, and should not be submitted to the device paradigm.
Now, I've got two longish paragraphs that I want to read from Borgman, because I think, again, they're good. And you can follow along with me.
[32:46] Genuine choices occur when one is called upon to decide between engagement and disengagement.

Such decisions are made in the realm of leisure and consumption, but often they are too close and inconspicuous to become visible in the usual categories of social science.
But a genuine choice is made when a family decides to eat out more often. The practice of preparing a traditional meal, of setting the table, of saying grace, of conversing and eating

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thoughtfully, is partly surrendered to the machinery of a fast food chain, and partly lost.
The meal has been impoverished to ordering and consuming standardized foods. Now, when one moves to or from city to city in pursuit of professional advancement, the possibility of a rooted kind of life is cut off, just as the means for the consumption of freely disposable commodities are increased.
When parents decide to give their child a stereo set and a receiver instead of a flute and instruction, they help to inundate the child with sounds and fail to encourage fully embodied and disciplined engagement with music.
[34:19] Whenever something is replaced rather than repaired, a piece of history, something that bespeaks and sustains the continuity of life, is then surrendered to the garbage heap, and an opportunity to mark and affirm the stages of life is lost.

Now, let me go on right into the next paragraph. It's clear that the further technological liberation from the duress of daily life, that this is only leading to more disengagement from skilled and bodily commerce with reality.
Perhaps the account above fails to do justice to the riches of information, entertainment, and games that the new electronics will present us with.
But these two will be consumed. But these two will be consumed. They will not make demands of commitment, discipline, or skill. They will be more diverting due to greater variety and closer fit with our individual tastes.
And since they will fail to center and illuminate our lives, however, their diversion will more and more lead to distraction and the scattering of our attention and the atrophy of our capacities.
[35:45] It's already apparent that the new video technology is not used by people as the crucial aid that finally allows them to develop into the historians, critics, musicians, sculptors, or athletes that they have always wanted to be.

Rather, the main consequence of this technological development appears to be the spread of pornography. Now, it's a little harsh, I think, but he's on to something, and I guess I'm acutely aware of this with our kids, especially our boys, because they're so drawn to this stuff, the Xbox and this and that, and they spend hours and hours on it.
And I suppose you could say, well, they are developing skills. And, of course, somebody wrote an article, or apparently the US military has found that people that have played these games make better fighter pilots.
Because they're able to cope with lots of information coming at them in this way. But I'm not sure I'm comforted by that.
I don't know. I mean, I was talking to some friends that I know who run a program in the mountains of California.
[37:22] It's an outward bound kind of program, but it's Christian. It's a really good program. And they have found, over the last number of years, that the interest of kids in these programs, you know, backpacking, mountaineering kinds of things, has just plummeted.

And it's true with outward bound, apparently. It's true with Knowles and all the other schools that were, that were, you know, have been such helpful things with so many people.
And I guess, I mean, the thought is, well, why? What's happening? And I don't think anyone really knows, but part of the problem is that kids can't break away, or aren't willing to break away from this electronic network that they're hooked up to.
Like, they're not, it's not that they want, they don't want to be away from their friends, it's that they don't want to be away from their computer. And that cannot be good.
Anyway, so getting to the question of reform of technology, Gorgman suggests that there are two prerequisites for the reform.
[38:52] The first is clarity with respect to the things that we want to protect from the device paradigm.

And the second, he puts it this way, is profound regard for our neighbors, for the lives of our neighbors.
Now, both of these things depend upon what we consider the purpose of life to be.
And so, Gorgman has a long discussion about the good life. How do we understand that? You know, what makes life worth living? But then he suggests that the beliefs about the purpose of life, about the good life, can't today simply be asserted.

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Certainly can't be assumed, but they can't be asserted either, or imposed. Rather, they need to be openly discussed and debated.
[40:06] And those of us who feel strongly must strive to represent our convictions about what constitutes the good life. And he says, simply, with enthusiasm, sympathy, and tolerance.

And he has a word for this, another unhelpful word. Deictic discourse. Deictic discourse need not cajole, threaten, or overwhelm.
The word deictic comes from the Greek, gosh, I can't even pronounce that, dekainai. There we go, thank you.
Which means to show, to point out, to bring to life, to set before. And then also to explain and teach.
Speakers of deictic discourse never finally warrant the validity of what they tell, but they point away from themselves to what finally matters.
[41:19] They speak essentially as witnesses. Enthusiasm gives deictic discourse the force of testimony. Sympathy requires that one testify not simply by setting out in some way what matters, but by reaching out to the peculiar condition in which one finds the listener, by inviting the listener to search his or her experiences and aspirations.

And so ensures the listener is as fully engaged as possible by the concern to be conveyed.
Sympathy gives deictic discourse the force of appeal.
And needless to say, I mean, I think that the church ought to be one of the places where the purpose of life, the gospel, is communicated in this way.
In sympathy, with enthusiasm, tolerance, and so forth. And I think, I mean, it's one thing to be critical of technology and to identify the parts of our lives that we don't want to surrender to the device paradigm.
But, for example, with kids, I mean, it's one thing to say, look, you can't spend four or five hours a day on these machines. But, of course, they're going to ask you, why not?
[43:06] What's wrong with that? And that's where your answer has to be along the lines of that we have to persuade them that there is more, that this impoverishment that they're walking into, that there is another way of living.

And I wish I was better at that. We need to figure out how to do that somehow. Anyway.
Okay, just in sum, the reform of technology lies in the recognition of and the restraint of what Bortman calls the device paradigm.
I think that's helpful. I find that helpful. And this recognition and this restraint involves a kind of analysis.
But, restraining the device paradigm or trying to open life up to engagement, this entails more than analysis.
[44:28] It entails this ongoing conversation about what makes life worth living. And then the ability to encourage each other in this.

Now, the last paragraph of Bortman's book, I'll read it to you. What, Bortman asks at the end of the book, is the likelihood of a vigorous and visible reform of technology?
Well, there's one point that I want to insist on and another that I feel easy about. I want to insist that the destiny of the focal things, the one thing that matters should one emerge at length, is the fulcrum of change.
We should measure the significance of the developments about us by the degree to which focal concerns are beginning to flourish openly, or whether they continue to live in hiding.
All other changes will be variants of technological concerns. Not that the latter are unimportant. The ultimate calamity would be the complete destruction of technology.
[45:53] It would be the eradication of all hope. The preservation and improvement of technology, however, is a penultimate success at best.

But I'm not anxious about whether focal concerns will in fact prosper. One would rightly be nervous about the possibility that a great thing may fail accidentally, that the kingdom may be lost for want of a nail.
But our focal concern will languish or prosper for essential reasons. And I hope it will prevail, and it sustains my hope. Now, I think, I think the, I'm not sure I fully understand that last paragraph, but I think he's, he's trying to encourage us to see that, and Borgman is a Christian thinker, that things like the church, you know, we have no need to fear that unless we get this right, the church will fail.

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So, the church is God's work. The church will survive. The church will thrive. The church will thrive. But, so we don't have to worry about that.
What we need then to worry about is trying to encourage each other to live more fully within these focal concerns, like worship.
[47:25] And friendship. And family. And what not. Okay. That's, that's your introduction to Albert Borgman.

And again, he's not the only one out there writing good stuff on modern technology. But I, I find him helpful and balanced.
And of course, he's down to earth. He's concerned about the impact of technology on ordinary people, like us. And, anyway, I hope you find it helpful too.
So, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Oh, question. Yes? If typing tapes are still available... Typing...
[48:28] Tapes used in a typewriter. Oh yeah. Ribbons. Ribbons. Is that the upgraded title?

Is Jim Packer a member of an underground movement? He has found a source for the ribbons. As we know a typewriter doesn't have a grammar check and a spelling check. So he doesn't have to deal with that. But there is this supply of ribbons.
Isn't that sinister in some way? Is that sinister in the progress of technology?
Now, is this a serious question Bill? Serious question. Is the availability of typewriter ribbons a sinister development? Is there something working behind this gush of technology which he seems to be surrounded with, which Jim Packer seems to avoid it, and yet it's there?
[49:54] Is it a form of hope? No. No, I don't know. I think I know what you mean, but I'm having a hard time.

I would not lament the loss of typewriter. I know Jim would. But let me give you another example though.
I think we've found, especially most recently, that... Do computers enable students to write better papers?
Okay? Now, in terms of the mechanism, I'm happy for that. I'm glad I do hand writing. I don't miss not handwriting. I'm sure something's lost by that.
But I'm not sure that I care enough about what's lost to go back. So, the typing business is okay with me, personally.
[51:03] But, in terms of the access to information made possible by the internet and so forth, which was supposed to make us all smarter.

Right? And in certain respects, maybe it does, but we do not find that it enables students to think better and to write better papers.
In fact, it's just the reverse. So, anyway, that's the kind of thing that I think I'm concerned about. But I still, I'm sorry, I don't know what to make of the ribbons. I'm sorry, I didn't express this too much, but...
The idea that ribbons are still available, it has to be a miracle of some sort. Yes? You got a group? Jim?
[52:20] If anyone wants to know how to get hold of typewriter ribbons, let them speak to me afterwards so I can tell them. Does your typewriter ever require repair?

Well, there is a point of substance here, I think, if I may pick up. Yeah. The substance is distinct from the trimmings.
There comes a point where students prefer, well, choose to simply reproduce information that they've found through the use of IT machinery and computers and so on.
They choose to reproduce that information and pass it up to us professors as their own essay, simply because the information is there.
If you have to hunt for information, you will think about it as you find it in a way that you won't think about it if it's there pre-packaged for you.
[53:37] So, I think you're absolutely right Craig to say that on balance, the resources of our IT age don't help students to produce better essays because they do actually distract students from thinking.

Thank you. Yeah. There was a great article in the Atlantic Monthly last year, and the title of it kind of says it all, but the title was, Is Google Making Us Stupid?

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And if you can find it, I would encourage you to read it. It's thoughtful that way. And what he, he makes the observation that he has become, since the advent of the internet, he's become a much more impatient reader.
And it's very, very increasingly difficult for him to read a long argument or a long argument developed in a long book.
Because we get in the habit of wanting things now. We want to know now, where's the information? And if it isn't forthcoming very quickly, then it must not be worth knowing.
[54:58] And I, I know myself that I'm impacted by that. I feel the same thing. And so, here again, we find that even almost unwillingly, we are impacted by this technology that we're surrounded by.

And it's, I don't know. Yeah, yeah. A lot of questions. I'll start here. Well, your comment about the, sometimes I think we focus on the complexity of the technology.
The minor miracles occurring inside the machines. But when we add the technology to the complexity of society, we often don't know what's going to come next. In terms of the interaction.
And a great example we're all familiar with is, you know, the advent of the cellular telephones. When they came along, I don't think they'll realize that they would change people's courtesy behaviors. All the rest of it. I was stuck in the airport in Calgary last week and found myself in a nice cozy place.
And then, of course, someone would come down and sat next to me. And I got the joy of listening to one end of the conversation I had no interest in. And I ended up moving three times. You know, moving away from people's conversations. It's a minor thing, but it's not a minor thing.
[56:15] And one reflects to the older technology, where someone went to a wall and put their head in a little box, so no one had to listen to them. So the phone comes along, it does amazing things, but it also impacts a complicated society, which maybe we can't predict.

And then frictions begin to build up around them. Yeah. I, too, have a concern about cell phones. I'll use that as an example, the alienating effect of them.
It preempts personal interaction. Nobody turns a cell phone off without being told to do so. I have seen two young men in a restaurant, in a booth.
They wanted to have a meal together. They are both talking on cell phones. I mean, I was tempted to think they were talking to each other. They couldn't do it some other way. I see, you know, a mother's got a baby buggy across a crowded parking lot, cars coming and going, with a toddler clinging to her skirt.
And she hoops out the cell phone, not to receive a call, but to make one. And there she is in the road, you know, traffic going by. I don't get it. I think that this is something that the Church has to be concerned about, because we are destroying face-to-face communication.
[57:26] But before you comment on this, I'll just mention that I was recently reading some psychological research that had been done about teenagers with cell phones. And they are terrified of getting out of the loop of information that's going on.

Who is dating who? What did they wear? Do you think that colour looks good? The most inane conversation was transcribed page after page by the researcher. It had nothing substantive in it at all.
So naturally they had to look for, okay, what is it that's really going on here? And what's really going on was being terrified about something happening out there that you were not a part of or didn't know about.
Now, you know, the cell phone has undoubtedly brought some benefits. I don't give anybody my number. I use it for every call. I'm a dinosaur. I know it. I'm actually proud to be a dinosaur.
But I think the Church has to be aware since our Gospel really travels on interpersonal communication and always has. I think it's a very important thing to say, you know, to be aware of what technology in particular that.
[58:34] But I suppose you could say the same thing about Twitter and so on. That can we make adequate use of these things and still have fellowship, whatever that was? Yeah. No, that's good. Thank you.

Can you tell us what you think about that? Well, I mean, I agree with you. Where I've noticed this with our kids is that they relate to each other through Facebook.
But they don't ever actually talk to each other or go to, you know, I mean, that's too extreme. But they spend a lot of time on Facebook interacting.

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And, gee, it seems to me like it might be a good idea to actually go be with these people at some point. So, I mean, that's a perfect model, I think, of this notion of disengagement.
And, you know, I mean, there are probably certain things become possible through this technology. But, you know, something is clearly lost, too.
[59:52] And it's a concern. Yeah, church. I mean, should the church be technologized in this way?

And I would say no. For just the reason you gave that the gospel is a face-to-face kind of thing. You know, you could argue this all the way up to a theology of the Incarnation.
This is God's world. He has created it. And he has redeemed it. In Christ, and the materiality, the physicality, the face-to-face, the engagement is part of his desire for us.
And if we seek to do this in some other way, it can't be good. Anyway, so, yeah. You were talking about the difference between things and devices.
And you can I call it as an example of a device. And a boat as an example of a thing. But it's not just really, in our view, sort of a modern technological example.
[61:02] Right. I would tend to put a computer in that category of a thing rather than a device. Which I think generally you think it should be a device.

It's a place to look up information and so on. It should be a device. But it has very much become a thing because it requires engagement. Mm-hmm. So through things like Facebook and chat rooms and even just trying to investigate something, it involves quite a bit of engagement.
And so people are engaging now with the technological item rather than engaging with, say, a group of other boat interests or a group of people who have a similar interest.
Yeah. So the engagement becomes a thing with an object. Yeah. No, I mean, I see that. I think that's a good point. I mean, it would depend on the person, right?
I mean, most people, you buy the computer and you just want it to do what it's supposed to do. No questions asked.
[62:13] You know, I don't care what's going on underneath. Don't talk to me about circuits and whatnot. Just do it. The thing that brought this to mind was that when we were talking about things, you said it requires often discipline engagement.

Yeah. And that's so important in teaching our kids the discipline to use this as a tool. Oh, yeah. Yeah.
Okay. Yeah. I think I also saw no difference between things and devices. I think it's really, we've been promoted to being an expert, really, consumers.
That's what it is. I think the key is not just how to use the devices, but to give it critical thinking and to really being able to use that eventually.
And I think a few weeks ago we were touching that about Christian education. And it's just that within the community of Christ, we interact with each other.
[63:27] And with children it is crucial that we develop that, you know, critical thinking. Personally, I benefit enormously from technology because I wear a hearing aid that is highly sophisticated.

And it's marvelous what it does for me. Yeah. Mind you, at times I wonder what the hell am I doing trying so hard to hear that it's senseless.
But that is not the point here, right? But going back to, you know, the new sense of technology and what we do with it, you know, we have warehouses full of computers and things we don't know what to do about.
So, you know, how do you go back to family? What if you go to a restaurant and you're told, you can't wear your cell phone has to be off here.
And if there's a family, you know, the manager comes to the kid and says, you know, what do you do with the family? And how do you connect with the queen? Because this is a family place. It's a place where we enjoy each other.
[64:44] I happen to have done that when I run a restaurant. And the parents were appalled at me and I just said, why you don't understand? You know, why are you having to meet each other?

Yeah. So, yeah. And then it sort of speaks and divides. It's sort of something takes you to sudden death and the other is a slow death.
Where you're impaired, you're handicapped yourself with things that strongly hypothesize yourself. And so, you know, what's wrong with being intense, you know?

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And I have to tell you, I went to a 15-year-old party in the Spanish community. It's a big deal. And to my amazement, you know, I was the MC and I was celebrating youth and being happy for the 16-year-old girl.
And the only people dancing were kids under five and people over 55. The other guys, they're all engaged in the little machines talking to each other about one place.
[65:55] And it's really what we were because we were enjoying music and dancing. And so, you know, it's really much more serious than what you think. Yeah, yeah. And then we face this, through violence, we face all these problems that people are fully empty and have nothing to account of life for.

But they're just mediums to this technology. And I'm not saying that's bad. I really love technology. And it's really bad. But, you know, we've got what we're here for.
It's supposed to serve us. Yeah. Back in the back, there were a couple of... I'd like to thank you for what you've said. It's put a few items in place.
I think very clearly that society has changed. I.e. mobility is there. You are forced to cut your roots when you move from one town to the other.
And so you force this on your kids so they cannot have their relationships when they are moved or other kids that they interfere with. I have one question that would be, has the church society as a group of people succeeded in communicating, as you said, with enthusiasm, sympathy, and...
[67:15] What was it, tolerance? The gospel? And I would be more specific to the 20 or let's say 15 to 30 year old group. Or are they deserting us in droves?

If so, why? Is it our attitude towards technology and devices? And I would agree with the lady from Trump because I would say the vote is a device.
It takes you from A to B. Whereas the computer could be viewed, and that's an attitude issue, as a thing. Because a computer can bring down government to use this trigger, for example, in the recent past.
And it can be threatening because it could mean you end up forbidden because of that. So is it our attitude in church which is wrong towards this device or devices with the cloud computing and so on?
Or is it something else? But the question is, how do we reach the 15 to 30 or the 20 to 25 year olds which are absent in our church?
[68:25] Have we become alien? That's what I was thinking too. Rather than the curse of darkness, let's bring light.

Because I'm thinking the iPhone, the blackberries, it's already happened. The horse is long out of the gate. You know, I go downtown on the Canada line, 90% of the people are on cell phones or iPhones or whatever they are, iPods.
That's already happened long, long ago happened. So us speaking against it, it's not going to change that. It's how are we going to reach a society who is so dependent on that?
And dependent on Twitter and Facebook and computers and all that stuff. Has our message, not our message, but our means of communication needs to change.
It's the right question. Needs to reach these people. It's like film too. We can either say it's all bad, it's all darkness, whatever. Or we can get engaged in it and reach people through the methods of communication that they are reachable through.
[69:37] Yeah. I mean I hope you don't hear either me or Borgman being Luddite in this way. It's already happened. There's... But the thing is, okay, say...

It's often common that young people, there's less and less dating, right? More and more the interaction happens online, on Facebook.
I'd rather get an email than not get any communication at all. Okay. But if we said... Say we said, okay, let's go with that. And let's encourage the electronic communications.
So we're going to come up with a way of being related to another person, in which there is ultimately no physical interaction at all.
It will all be electronic. That's the kind of thing that you would explore by way of science fiction, probably. But it's obviously a limit to that, right?
[70:43] Sooner or later these people are going to have to actually see each other, somehow. So then the question is, okay, where is the limit?

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Where do we draw this line? Or where do we begin to encourage whoever it is to, well, why don't you actually go see them and meet them?
You see this in terms of internet dating. We know more and more couples who have gotten together by way of the internet now. So, I mean, I think it obviously works and happens.
I don't think it's a bad thing. But there comes a time when they've got to actually meet each other and look each other in the eye and talk to each other.
And are they prepared for that? I mean, do they have the social skills and so forth? Is that in our role to encourage face-to-face communication rather than say we're against cell phones or blackberries or blackberries?
[71:45] Yeah, that's it. Because that point, you just lose people. Yes. If they have an iPhone that they rely on to keep in touch with their kids or their parents or their friends or whatever, us telling them that this is not a good thing, we just lose them.

Right. So, that's Borgman's whole thing about we need to be clear about what we think, what we believe are the things that make life worth living.
And we need to be able to persuade others in ways that are in sympathy and tolerance, enthusiastically and so forth.
That's where we need, I think, we need to think about these things. First of all, what does make life worth living? And then, how do you talk about it in such a way as to make it winsome, as to make it attractive?
And I think we need to be better at that. Like, with the kids and the wilderness experiences and so forth, which that whole thing meant a lot to me.
[73:04] So, I feel like my kids are missing out on something. But, I can't just say, look, you've got to do this because you're missing out on it. It's like, no, I have to somehow make it attractive.

Yeah, sorry. My question is, how do we reach these kids? I'm a dinosaur. I may use Facebook and I may be using Skype to have been in contact with my kids, which are thousands of miles separate. And that's what I've been doing for the last few years. And I've been in touch with them, which I would have never done before. Yeah. Right. The question then is, do we isolate ourselves, being aliens, and say, you have to come to church and listen to some dude up there who's talking down to us with no interaction, or, which they refuse and can say, deserve the church in the house, or do we engage with them through their means of communication, which they like and their use, and their society imposes on them, they may not want to do it themselves, but if they're not, they're out.
So they better be in. Yeah. So does the church engage with forums, active forums, with people at a lower age, and then through that say, hey, by the way, meals together has got a plus.
By the way, the real meaning of life means what the gospel tells us. Yeah. But if we isolate ourselves from these forums, then, you know, we'll all be 80 and there'll be no young people.
[74:35] Yeah. Yeah. That's a good point. Moms and dudes are consecrated, it's probably helpful. But not for the 50 and fabulous. Maybe that's a little bit.

Yeah. Yeah. And as I have, in Texas, I got rather uplifting from there. Most of the centers of learning in Texas have now gone back to using books, instead of, you know, fake mail coming out of the machine, you know?
Which I think is a good sign. Yeah. You had a point. As a teacher, I think it's incredible. I keep hearing parents say, we don't know what to do.
Well, what are we being parents about? I've never had a problem of telling my son what to do. I'm saying to them all the time that I have my input. And the other thing we're not looking at is that I keep getting reports across my desk because I've got webits and social justice.
Like, I've got everything that people send me information. And there is a health issue with all of this stuff. I see the kids all day. They've got their cell phones. So we had to make a rule you can't have them.
[75:46] They have to be off in the classroom. You can't have them. Because they were all day with iPods stuck on their ears and cell phones at their heads. And we already know that there's a nerve problem with the side of your face that you've always got this thing connected to.

And they go home and they're on me and they're on a computer. I've seen kids have seizures because they watched a movie. They had their cell phones and whatever other devices, computers all day.

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And then they went to the arcade and then they collapsed and were taken to the hospital. And I've said before, just another aside, there's a part of critical thinking that's destroyed by losing the computer.
That's being lost. They've documented it. And it will never be there again once we lose it. Once we're gone and the kids with the computers are the only people on the earth, that piece of thinking is gone and it's crucial to critical thinking.
And the report said that because of the Wii and the computer use and all the devices they're hooked up to, and now we can get a phone that's hooked in our ear and we just wear it all day and we think people are knots on the street talking to themselves.
[76:51] They do have a person connected to. They don't know the results of that medical knowledge yet. They know that it's occurring because now they're starting to see it.

And so how many years is it before we know what kind of damage has been done? So it's a medical thing. And I just say it's seeing kids all day with all these devices.
And then they go home and the parent isn't saying, well, okay, you know, you need an hour's break. You need some fresh air. You need to have a friend besides the computer. Because my brother-in-law, the TV, the computer is his social life.
My sister sits over there watching TV and he's on that computer all the time. And I just think that that's number one in the health issues.
Like it's great health and technology. And to Bill's question, I still have a fountain pen I'm still finding. And I don't think it means that, you know, that Dr. Patrick and I are going to take over the world.
[77:56] I think it's great. And I went to do my typing labels the other day because I don't know a lot about computers. I like the little roll you put in and you twiddle it up and you type all your name.

And you take it out and you rip it in there. And I was stuck because I thought, how do I do legal? Like I really didn't know. So I came a bit of a logic. But, you know, that was Boston. I used to enjoy that little task.
You'd say the thing over and... But anyway, that, you know, I really cautioned parents about that how much. And how much. Yes.
Yes. Do you want to say something, huh? I heard on the radio this week that by 2045 we will have eternal life.
Thanks to the gospel of technology. yeah. It's really cool. Yeah. That's chilling, huh? I won't be around, I think.
[78:54] Well, thanks so much. You've started. Yes. Thank you.

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