

"More Like the Amish" **Genesis 4:16-24**

INTRODUCTION

About ten years ago, my wife and I were in Bird in the Hand, a tiny village outside of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in Amish country. Anyway, we were in Bird in the Hand and I overheard an Amish man telling an English man (that's us), *"You English need to be more like the Amish."*

He was right, in one particular realm at least. In that realm, we need to be **just like** the Amish on the one hand and **more like** the Amish on the other hand and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Turn in your Bibles to the passage that I read - Genesis 4:16-24.

TECHNOLOGY AS BLESSING

This is a fascinating passage that reveals the beginnings of human civilization. Verses 1-15 give us its context. Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain became jealous of Abel and murdered him, whereupon God banished him to the land of Nod. He then settled there with his wife and had children. His children had children who had children and so on until the first human society was formed. As verses 16-24 make clear, this first society that came from Cain was a godless one. What we have here then is the beginning of the self-sufficient secular society that the New Testament calls the "world."

Now, if the Bible were a biased account, it would have ascribed nothing good to this godless society. But it isn't a biased account. So, it reveals three good things it developed – the semi-nomadic discipline in verse 20, the cultural arts in verse 21, and technology in verse 22.

It's that last thing that I'm going to focus on and address this morning. Look at verse 22. It mentions a great grandson of Cain whose name was Tubalcain. Tubalcain was a craftsman, verses 22 says, who forged all instruments of bronze and iron, the first blacksmith.

What we have in this verse is technology. Already in the earliest stages of civilization, human beings are beginning to invent things and properly so. That is clearly implied here. This verse shows that

technology is a gift from God that He gives to bless us.

21st century people of all people understand that. Have you ever thought about all the technology that makes our everyday lives so much easier and better? Remember those little correction strips we used to use when we made a mistake on our typewriters – how disruptive they were. But when we make a mistake on our computers now, we just quickly push a couple of buttons and are on our way again. Computers, telephones, antibiotics, cars, airplanes, washers and dryers, central heating, Slinkies, and much more. All those things are gifts from God that He gave us to bless us.

TECHNOLOGY AS CURSE

The problem is that they sometimes end up doing just the opposite of that. Genesis goes on to show us that we live in a fallen world and in that kind of world, blessings can become curses. That's the way that it is with everything including technology. The very technologies that God gives us to bless us end up cursing us as well. They not only benefit us but harm us as well.

Take telephones for example. It amazing isn't it? They allow us to communicate instantly with almost anyone anywhere in the world. Those of you who talk to your children or grandchildren who live a thousand miles away know what an incredible blessing they are.

But they're a curse as well. A physics professor asked his class, *"What happens in a bathtub when the human body is submerged below the surface of the water?"* To which one of his students replied, *"The phone rings."* That's about it. The moment we put a phone in our home, car, pocket, or purse, we're inviting anyone to interrupt us anytime that they want to. Think about the number of calls you get from people that you really don't want to talk to about subjects that you really don't want to talk about. Nothing disrupts the tranquility of a home, car, or anywhere that we take it like telephones do.

What is true of telephones is true of countless technologies –

televisions, automobiles, computers, central heating, electrical lighting, Ipods, cell phones, fax machines, and much more. The very technologies that God gave us to bless us end up cursing us as well. As sociologist Tony Campolo correctly points out, they have *“led to a disruption of people’s lives, put them on edge, diminished the quality of their families, and lured them into hectic lifestyles that leave them exhausted.”* The high tech lives that we’re living, in other words, are killing us mentally, emotionally, physically, and even spiritually. It’s what you might call *the tyranny of technology*.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. We can free ourselves from the tyranny of technology. We can make technology a blessing and not a curse and here’s how – by doing two things.

JUST LIKE THE AMISH

First, we must be **just like** the Amish. Let me explain.

All technologies have what you might call intended effects, the consequences that their inventors attempted to achieve.

Television is an example of what I mean. It gives us some of the best entertainment in the world. Before its invention, for instance, most people had never seen a World Series game. But after, almost everyone has. That was an intended effect of television.

But there’s something that we need to grasp for our own good. All technologies have imbedded in them ideas or effects that go beyond their intended function – ideas or effects that impact culture and us in unexpected ways.

Going back to television, it has had many effects that its inventors never intended. In his book [The Disappearance of Childhood](#), social commentator Neil Postman reveals one of those. It has caused childhood to disappear.

Childhood is a social artifact. It isn’t something that just naturally exists. It is something that a society creates. It creates it by keeping adult truths a secret from its children. Parents reveal those truths to

them only as they are mentally and emotionally able to handle them.

But according to Postman, television makes that kind of secrecy impossible. By the age of 7, the typical American child has seen television programs about homosexuality, incest, abortion, rape, war, crime, alcoholism, drug addiction, and more. 7 year olds now know about the world what adults know. The result is that they don't have a childhood, which in turn leaves them scarred.

What I'm trying to say is that television had an effect that went way beyond its intended function. Those of you who are over 50 had a childhood. Those of you under 50 most likely did not. Television made childhood disappear.

That's the way it is with all technologies. They have imbedded in them ideas or effects that go beyond their intended function, many of which are detrimental to us. Well, it's time that you and I start identifying what those detrimental ideas and effects are.

That's what the Amish have done. Listen to what an Amish bishop told a class from Eastern College: *"We didn't outright reject these things* (cars, telephones, electricity, and so on). *We just stood back to see what has happened to the families that had them. And when we saw what it did to the likes of your kind, we decided that we would just as soon not have those things happen to us."*

You and I need to become **just like** the Amish in that regard. We should do what they did. As the old bishop said it, we should stand back and see. We should take the time to observe and analyze what technologies are doing to us.

Take all of those computer games that children and adults spend so much time and money on. Let me ask you a question. What are they doing to our children and us? I don't know the answer to that question because I don't enjoy playing them. But if I did play them or had children who did, I'd definitely examine what they were doing to us.

So that's the first thing that we have to do to make technology a blessing and not a curse. We have to be **just like** the Amish. We have

to stand back and see. We must observe and analyze what technologies are doing to us. We should do that prayerfully and carefully, asking the Holy Spirit for wisdom as we do.

MORE LIKE THE AMISH

There's a second thing that we have to do. We have to be **more like** the Amish. Again, let me explain.

There's something about the Amish that you may not know. They don't believe that cars, telephones, electricity, and other technologies are sinful. They just limit what they think are the detrimental effects of those things in their lives.

Examples abound. Many have telephone booths installed at the end of their driveways. They don't think telephones are wrong. They just don't want them intruding into their homes. Many have electricity in their barns. They don't think electricity is wrong. They just don't want it destroying their family life with all the gadgets that accompany it. And many hire people to take them places in cars. They don't think cars are wrong. They just don't want to own them and have all the restlessness and disruptions they cause.

Now, if we want to make technology a blessing and not a curse, we must be **more like** the Amish in that regard. Notice I didn't say **just like** the Amish. I don't know about you but I'm not going to start riding around in buggies any time soon, especially in the winter. But we must become **more like** the Amish. Once we examine and identify what a technology's detrimental effects are, we must then do whatever is necessary to limit or eliminate those effects. Like the Amish, let's control technology, not be controlled by it.

Take central heating for example. Richard Foster points out that central heating has dramatically altered family dynamics. Before it, family members spent their time together in the same room, the one that was heated. That in turn was conducive to relating to and interacting with each other in close and personal ways. But central heating changed

all of that. Family members now go to their separate rooms to watch television, listen to the stereo, and so on. They don't spend nearly the time together now as a result. That was an unintended and detrimental effect of central heating.

But we can and should limit that effect. We should do whatever we have to do to make sure that our family spends time together in the same room. It may take setting down some rules or not having televisions, stereos, or games in other rooms or finding activities and games that are enjoyable to everyone. Whatever it is, we must not let central heating diminish family life.

What we do with central heating, we should do with all the technologies in our lives. We should be **more like** the Amish. Control technologies. Don't be controlled by them. Take power over them and use them in beneficial not detrimental ways.

CONCLUSION

Our spiritual life depends on it. It is a fundamental principle that our ordinary life is the context of our spirituality. It's in that ordinary life that we live for God, that is, interact with and serve Him. That means that anything that diminishes our ordinary life also diminishes our life with God. Because our ordinary life and our life with God are the same, it's impossible for technologies to diminish the first without also diminishing the second.

Which is exactly what's happening today. I've seen it in my own life and the lives of others. Technologies are diminishing the spiritual lives of those who profess to follow Jesus. They don't have a vivid sense of His presence. They aren't maturing into Christlikeness. And one of the primary reasons is what they're letting technologies do to them.

But the good news is that it doesn't have to be that way. Do two things. First, be **just like** the Amish. Identify what technologies are doing to us. Second, be **more like** the Amish. Control what technologies are doing to us. Technology will be a blessing, not a curse, if we do.