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**I Write Algorithms for a Living. God Doesn’t Want Me to Quit.**

At a moment of career disillusionment, a new book gave me a biblical perspective on the blessings and dangers of big tech.

Collin Prather | |July 25, 2023

In the last decade, our lives have become increasingly saturated with digital technology. Apps and platforms play outsized roles socially, professionally, casually, and corporately; in work, school, and church. It can be hard to remember how we used to carry on without the technological conveniences of modern life. Even many young adults feel a chasm between the tech norms they grew up with and the world they inhabit today.

This shift seems even starker when we try to map our day-to-day digital experiences—instant news, AI chatbots, and the Metaverse—onto those we read about in the Bible. In his latest book, *God, Technology, and the Christian Life*, Tony Reinke outlines an incisive “theology of technology,” grounded in Scripture, which draws a clear connection between our lived experiences and those of our Old Testament heroes. In so doing, he sets a helpful foundation for a biblically-aligned worldview on modern technology.

I read this book at a timely moment, while dealing with a bout of disillusionment over my career. I’m a data scientist, a career technologist who spends his days writing algorithms that generate numbers and recommendations that populate the screens of millions of smartphones all over the world. My work involves the same techniques that large tech companies have exploited for more pernicious purposes, making them a focal point of cultural controversy.

I certainly appreciate the blessings that modern technology affords, and my tech-development day job brings real satisfaction. Yet I can’t help maintaining a healthy dose of skepticism toward ubiquitous tech use. It’s difficult to overstate the degree to which our daily habits have grown dependent on the platforms of big tech. Given their pervasiveness, it’s jarring to consider how many of them have vaulted to social prominence not through careful deliberation, but because of the revenue-seeking, data-hungry, often myopic actions of capital-heavy corporations. As a Christian, this reality has weighed heavily on my conscience and led to serious introspection over my vocational path.

Some may be surprised to find that such ambivalence is common among workers in tech-heavy fields. Their honest reflections won’t be found in public-facing press releases or Tweet storms, but in the anonymous corners of online forums. Backed by one of America’s most exclusive and lucrative startup accelerators, [Hacker News](https://news.ycombinator.com/) is the cool news curator frequented by founders, developers, and industry-insiders. Between IPO announcements and code-heavy how-tos, the site regularly features nervous posts by seasoned technologists, petitioning for help reconciling their disillusionment with technology, their careers, and their lack of happiness. A quick scroll through the responses confirms that there is no consensus on what the answers are, or even where to begin looking.

**New clarity on old priorities**

This is the conundrum that Reinke’s book steps into. He gives an end-to-end account of tech’s lifecycle, covering its inception by God, its inaugural biblical stewards, its growth and development in cities, its increasingly idolatrous pretensions, and its final judgment. When it comes to honoring God with our technology, Reinke asserts that contemporary innovations don’t raise new questions so much as call for new clarity on old priorities. It’s through this simple paradigm that he applies the Bible’s ancient wisdom to our modern technological experiences.

Reinke begins his narrative in an unlikely place, with a substance that covers our driveways, streets, and playgrounds: tar. He uses tar (some Bible translations call it “pitch” or “bitumen”) as a common medium to connect the stories of Noah’s ark (Gen. 6) and the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11).

This example points to one of the book’s prevailing themes: Technology can be used either to glorify God or humanity, yet God remains sovereign in either case. Noah faithfully obeyed God’s command to construct the greatest boat of his time, and dutifully waterproofed it with tar. Just a few generations later, the Babelites cleverly paired tar with baked bricks in a bid to build themselves up into heaven. The same technology led to two opposing outcomes, yet neither episode posed any threat to God or strayed outside his control.

This portion of the book calls into question whether we can assign sweeping moral labels to technology itself. Instead, Reinke emphasizes how God is more concerned about the motives we bring to technology and the spiritual consequences of employing it in self-exalting ways. The problem with the Tower of Babel, he writes, citing [one Genesis commentary](http://www.amazon.com/dp/0802803377/?tag=christtoday-20), “is not that it makes God insecure, but that it sets man on a new path of self-confining self-destruction. Man’s increasing ambition and power don’t threaten God; they threaten man himself, because, ‘the more power they are able to concentrate, the more harm they will be able to do to themselves and the world.’”

Reinke’s solution is not that technologists abandon their craft, but instead that tech producers and consumers alike learn to see God in their tech. As he explains, affirming God as the creator of all technology and the teacher of all innovation turns science and engineering into a divine game of question and answer—a sort of spiritualized Marco Polo. We ask God what is possible, and he answers through the material world. Further, these lessons are a gift he gives us to ameliorate the curse of sin on creation. It’s through this lens that Reinke relates the God of Isaiah 28:23–26, who mercifully doles out agricultural instruction, to the world of modern tech.

The book’s greatest contributions lie in the way it develops a vocabulary to reason about new innovations, and in a pithy phrase—the “Gospel of Technology”—used to set the good news of Jesus against the idolatrous tech propositions of our era. Most Christian discourse carries a latent uneasiness with the pervasiveness of technology, but it often fails to clearly articulate what we’re opposed to or why. Reinke gives a name to our unease and makes a strong case for a moderate, tempered, nuanced, faith-filled approach, which stands in stark contrast to the false promises of fulfillment, redemption, and control laid out by the Gospel of Technology.

Careful readers, whether weary of yet another tech book or dizzied by the endless supply of opinions on the topic, will appreciate that Reinke’s book brings needed context to our current state of affairs by taking stock of ideas and events from across human history. Ultimately, he reminds us of the close and profound parallels between our modern tech tensions and the challenges faced by previous generations. “This is the human dilemma,” he writes. “Human innovation is a wonderful gift but a disappointing god. We cannot save ourselves. In the end, our innovations leave hearts unsatisfied, souls lost, and bodies cold in the grave.”

**God’s sovereignty over innovation**

Christians should walk away from this book assured that however technology may advance during our lifetimes, we ultimately have only God to fear (Matt. 10:28), because, as Reinke puts it, his “sovereignty cradles our technological futures.” We’re reminded that no level of human innovation can satisfy the longings of man’s heart, which transcend the constraints of our time (Ecc. 3:11) and find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

Personally, the book left me feeling exhorted to press deeper into my search for God in data science. Reinke’s description of the biblical precedent for understanding God through his creation, and thereby through our craft, has heightened my attention toward God’s place in my work. Further, it has given me a firm footing to evaluate my tech habits and to navigate the ethical quandaries that come with working in the tech industry. Reinke’s insight that new technologies do not (and will not) stop to critique themselves offers fresh motivation to consider and communicates the risks of technology.

Thankfully, the book avoids and denounces the fear-stoking tone that’s typically associated with Christian writing on the topic. Instead, it lays out a compelling argument that both tech optimists and pessimists tend to sell God short. We’re not wrong, Reinke affirms, to have a “low-grade discomfort” with this age of innovation. But as we wait for Christ’s return, we can trust that our sovereign God reigns over even the most unsettling prospects we might face.

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