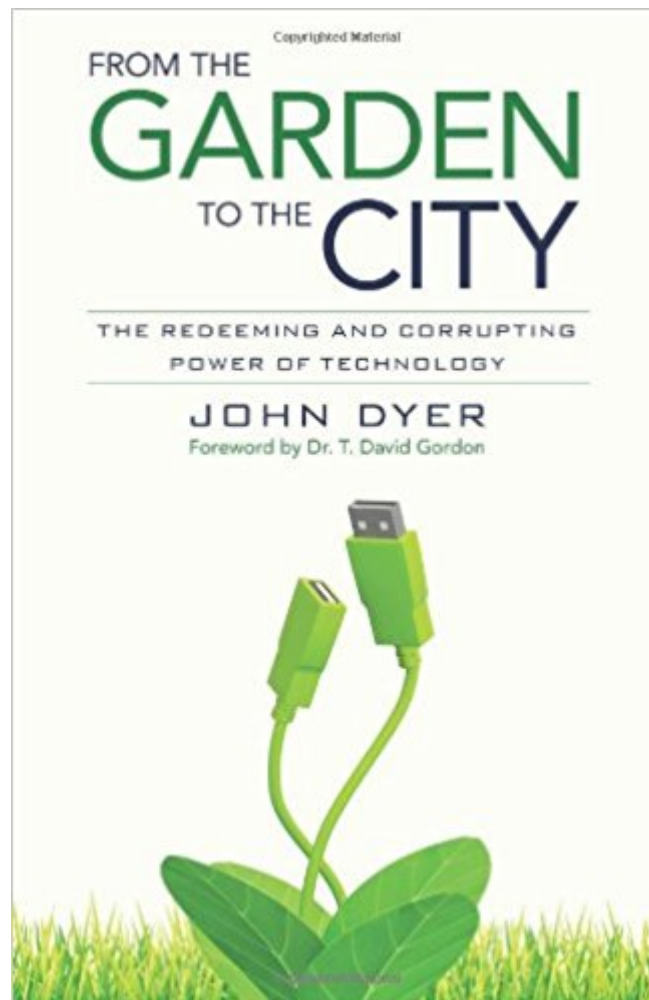




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From The Garden To The City: The Redeeming And Corrupting Power Of Technology



Synopsis

Believers and unbelievers alike are saturated with technology, yet most give it little if any thought. Consumers buy and upgrade as fast as they can, largely unaware of technology's subtle yet powerful influence. In a world where technology changes almost daily, many are left to wonder: Should Christians embrace all that is happening? Are there some technologies that we need to avoid? Does the Bible give us any guidance on how to use digital tools and social media?

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It's frequently funny, surprisingly moving, and consistently smart--a great guide for those who want to begin thinking about how technology shapes us and how we can live faithfully with it. -- Andy Crouch, author of *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* John is the unusual person who is as expert in information technology as he is familiar with the Bible, and he is even more unusual in being able to move to and fro with ease and come up with striking and helpful insights. His voice, though gentle, speaks with authority. -- Albert Borgmann, author of *Real American Ethics* This book is lively and accessible to techies and non-techies alike. -- *World Magazine* [offers] a realistic hope for what is to be done with the fallenness of technology -- *Christian Research Journal* It's frequently funny, surprisingly moving, and consistently smart--a great guide for those who want to begin thinking about how technology shapes us and how we can live faithfully with it. -- Andy Crouch, author of *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* John is the unusual person who is as expert in information technology as he is familiar with the Bible, and he is even more unusual in being able to move to and fro with ease and come up with striking and helpful insights. His voice, though gentle, speaks with authority. -- Albert Borgmann, author of *Real American Ethics* This book

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John Dyer (ThM, Dallas Theological Seminary) has been a web developer for more than ten years, building tools for Apple, Microsoft, Harley Davidson, and the Department of Defense. He currently serves as the Director of Web Development for Dallas Theological Seminary and lives near Dallas, Texas, with his wife, Amber, and two children, Benjamin and Rebecca. He has written on technology and faith for Christianity Today and Collide Magazine. From the Garden to the City is his first book. You can find out more about his coding and writing at j.hn/.

Most of us are aware of the vast social changes that the new media are bringing to our lives. As Christians, many of us are concerned about these changes or are at least aware of a "technological imperative". I don't mean the technological imperative that we must use technology but the technological imperative that if we Christians are going to use technology, we'd better know how to use it in godly ways. Like Tim Challies' excellent "The Next Story," John Dyer's new book, "From the Garden to the City," is an excellent primer on what Christians should think about and how Christians should wisely use technology. In fact, John Dyer has given us a concise but profound theology of technology. Dyer is well-qualified to write this book, having not only a degree in theology but also being the Director of Web development at Dallas Theological Seminary. Many of you may know him from his wise and wonderful blog: doneatthefruit.com. There are so many wonderful things to commend about Dyer's book, but I'll have to limit myself to a few.

1. First, I love the way that Dyer doesn't just use a few Bible verse to cobble together a theology of technology. Instead, he tells the story of God's relationship with man "From the Garden to the City." You'll be surprised to learn just how important technology is in the Bible! While the Bible begins in the Garden, it ends in a City - the Heavenly Jerusalem.
2. Dyer organizes most of his material around the 4-fold movement of God in his relation to man: Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration. This is a very useful and theological way to think about technology.
3. "From the Garden to the City" avoids the extremes of "technological instrumentalism," which states that our tools are completely neutral and don't actually transform us, and the other extreme of "technological determinism," which states that technology is an unstoppable force that is driving society.
4. Dyer restates a lot of familiar material (for readers who have already investigated the effects of technology on us) from writers like Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman. But he also goes beyond what they've said and extends and applies what these men have said. Along the way, Dyer diagnoses the ways that technology transforms us, even as we use

technology to transform the world. He also gives plenty of practical examples, not only from new technologies but also from older technologies. My favorite example of the importance of older technologies (maybe because I'd already had this thought myself 25 years ago) was how God orchestrated the timing of the Exodus with the new technology of writing.⁵ I especially like the way that Dyer provides not only useful definitions (for example, technology is "the human activity of using tools to transform God's creation for practical purposes") but also useful principles. My favorite principle of all is Dyer's guiding principle for technology: "Technology is for the table." That's it. Everything we do with technology "should be directed toward enriching the few, precious face-to-face encounters we have in our busy world." There's much, much more. But this is a profound and thoughtful book for those who want to delve more deeply into how Christians should think about and use the tools, especially the new ones, that we and our culture are using both for good and evil. It merits a careful reading.

I reviewed this book for my Theology of Technology course as a part of my Masters in Technology and Ministry program in City Vision University. In this book, Dyer goes through four "four R's": reflection, rebellion, redemption, restoration. These four R's help explain that technology is indeed not neutral. Yet, there are very little ways for us to research a "biblical position for technology or anything about how technology fits into the redemptive story told in the Scriptures." He explains how in today's modern world, we are very similar to Adam and Eve in the garden. We often consume technology without being fully aware of the changes it can bring. Thus, he decided to write this book in order to "grapple with those changes and understand how we can fulfill our role as God's image bearers in a world very far removed from the garden." (From the Garden, intro). I thought this book was extremely interesting and unique in the fact that it goes through the biblical story with a technological lens. For example, in chapter five he goes through the rebellion of Adam and Eve and how God actually participated in their use of the first invention of technology: clothing. Just as we use technology to sometimes hide from God, Adam and Eve invented clothing in rebellion against him. "Instead of living every day in a loving, open relationship with him depending on his power and grace for their existence and joy they tried to construct a world that would allow them to exist apart from him." Through this first human invention, we found that we are both creative and can use technology to reflect God's image, yet it is also a reflection of

their rebellion against him and his authority and since then, we build from sin-cursed material. Yet, something happened after that, God transformed their clothing. In that transformed clothing, God affirmed that even after the fall humanity is called to use its creativity to continue cultivating his creation. Second, God made it known that from time to time he will participate with humanity in doing technology. Finally, God was saying that while technology can temporarily ease some of our pain, we must not be so foolish as to make it our ultimate source of hope. (From the Garden chapter five). I have never heard technology taught from this point of view before and it was so enlightening and transforming to read about technology as a part of the biblical story. He goes on to talk about the redemption of technology and finally restoration. In this chapter, Dyer explains that though people worry that technology is destroying human life, "these worries typically leave out an important detail: the way the biblical story ends, and the role technology plays in that ending. In this chapter, Dyer talks about Jesus and the role technology played in his life on earth. In fact, Jesus was a carpenter; he was a "creator and user of technology, using tools to transform the natural world for practical purposes. He goes on to explain how the most powerful technology Jesus interacted with was the cross. The cross, though it was created by man in order to do evil, Jesus transformed it to accomplish a miracle. My favorite quote from this chapter was "In his death and resurrection, Jesus transformed the cross and the grave from symbols of death to symbols of life and the transformation that his Spirit begins to work when we believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God | we shouldn't view technology as a temporary aberration of a fallen world. Instead, Jesus has offered a portrait of technology according to God's original design, for his glory, and for the building up of the body of Christ through embodied life. (From the Garden chapter nine) I definitely recommend this book because through it you will learn that technology can be used to be a reflection of our Creator. Though it has the potential to be used for sin, it can also be used for redemptive purposes and ultimately, God's plan includes the restoration of technology. It provides a unique experience for the reader and will enlighten your perspective on using technology in a deeper way.

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