

Text: Job 28; Our World Belongs to God, Article 50
Title: Testing Our Limits - Technology and Wisdom
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If we were at all unaware of the way technology can make and remake our world, this past year and a half has given us proof upon proof of how much we are indeed immersed in and shaped by the technology around us.

Our experience of church, for the most part, has been repackaged to a box filled with flickering pixels of light rather than the tangible bodies and presence of people around us.

We have hosted birthdays parties and anniversary celebrations via screen. We have attended funerals and said good-bye to loved ones while crying in front of our laptops. We have been kept at a distance from each other, and brought together by the technology available to us.

And our world has been remade by the work of scientists and virologists and doctors and lab technicians and microbiologists who have worked and laboured nonstop and with break-neck speed to develop the vaccines that are finally promising a world returned to us with every jab in an arm, every line up at a pharmacy, every vaccine appointment booked.

We are more aware of how technology has made and remade our world now more than ever. And we're more likely to head-nod as we read this article from Our World Belongs to God:

Grateful for advances
in science and technology,
we participate in their development...
We welcome discoveries that prevent or cure diseases
and that help support healthy lives.

Now more than ever we can say a hearty "Thanks be to God!" for the discovery of effective Covid-19 vaccines. Because those healthy lives the Testimony mentions? Those are our healthy lives. Our return to hugs and mask-less conversations. Summer camping and backyard barbecues.

But even as we're grateful for these advances in science and technology, we are also more deeply aware of technology's limitations.

Technology has made and remade our world...and it's not always for the better. After a year of living almost exclusively through our tech, we know how deeply unsatisfying a life mediated by screens can be. And as we emerge out of this time, returning to our normal healthy lives made possible by the good work of scientific discoveries, what have we learned about the role of tech in our lives?

What do we keep about this past year?
What do we leave?
How do we even begin to reflect on this?

Job is not usually at the top of anyone's list for helpful guidance in how to navigate 21st century technology. But the Contemporary Testimony draws our attention to this chapter in Job as part of the Scriptural witness that provides the foundation for Article 50 that we just read.

Job is giving a lengthy and impassioned speech about the power of God and the unjust way he's being treated to an audience of really unhelpful and overly-defensive friends, when his words are interrupted with this out of nowhere chapter on mining, precious gemstones, and the pursuit of wisdom.

Imagine you're watching your favourite prestige drama and the protagonist is having an emotional speech at the end of the season finale - no, the series finale - and all of a sudden the camera breaks away to someone you've never seen before reading a poem out of nowhere. With no apparent connection to the main story. That's kinda what we got here in Job 28.

There is a mine for silver
and a place where gold is refined.
Iron is taken from the earth,
and copper is smelted from ore.

And it goes on like that. Describing in detail just how humans extract precious stone from the earth, how they "search out the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness" and "dangle and sway" from ropes descending through shafts cut into earth "untouched by human feet".

People assault the flinty rock with their hands
and lay bare the roots of the mountains.
They tunnel through the rock;
their eyes see all its treasures.
They search the sources of the rivers
and bring hidden things to light.

The poet is painting a picture of the ingenuity, the innovation, the sheer ambition of the human will to discover, explore, and change the world with the technology available.

And the poet includes god-like language in describing this process.

The searching for the sources of rivers might sound like a throw-away line to us, but in the cultural mythology of that time, the Ugaritic god, El, was said to dwell at the sources of two rivers.¹ Humans by sheer ambition and innovation was closing in on the very dwelling place of gods.

And surely you can't miss the allusion to the Hebrew creation account - humans entering the darkness and bringing what was hidden to light. Let there be light! And there was light. God-like, indeed.

¹ Carol A. Newsom, "Book of Job: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections", *New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, p. 530.

In contrast to the animals around them - the lions who are king on land and falcons who soar in the air - humans remake the world around them.

It's not until a third of the way through, the poet lands his theme:

But where can wisdom be found?
Where does understanding dwell?

Now you might be trying to beat me to the punch and see where this is all going: "Ah! Okay. Okay. This is where the poem is going to take a turn like the Tower of Babel. This will be the moral of the story. Human ambition and human technology gets everything wrong. And this is where Pastor Amanda is going to tell us how horrible our smartphones are."

And you would be....wrong. At least mostly wrong.

There's no easy reduction here like "Wisdom good. Technology bad." In fact the poet describes the ingenuity of human technology with awe and with no apparent judgement. The next section of the poem that follows in verses 15-19 reads like an encyclopedia for all the known kinds of gems and stones that humans dug up out of the earth. Onyx. Topaz. Crystal. Jasper. Coral. Rubies. And, while our English translation can't adapt to this, the poet uses 5 different words for different kinds of gold.²

This is not just about technology but also the kind of expertise that comes along with it. The ability and know-how to decode and categorize and order and remake the world around us.

Most of wisdom literature in Scripture - Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, wisdom psalms - build on the metaphor of wisdom as something to acquire, to buy, to find. Like rubies. Like precious jewels. The poet here turns that metaphor on its head. Wisdom is not out there somewhere to find like the stones in the dust of the earth. Wisdom is not found in the depths. Not in the skies. It's nothing you can buy or purchase, dig for or fly to. In fact the poet tell us point blank in verse 21:

Wisdom is hidden from the eyes of every living thing.

So, where in the world can wisdom be found then?

God understands the way to it
and he alone knows where it dwells...
when God established the force of the wind
and measured out the waters,
when God made a decree for the rain
and a path for the thunderstorm,
then God looked at wisdom
and appraised it;
God confirmed it and tested it.

What is God doing when God looks at wisdom and appraises it?

² Newsom, "Book of Job", *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 531.

The poet describes God in the act of creation. Measuring out the waters. Setting a rhythm of rain and the inner workings of thunderstorms and their path. Establishing the force of the wind.

God is in the act of making the world and ordering it.
Putting everything in its proper place with limits and boundaries.

If you remember back in our Sabbath series in the fall, this act of separation and distinction, of limits and difference, is key to God's created order.

And here this is wisdom.

In his book, *The Tech-Wise Family*, Andy Crouch, unpacks the role of technology in the life of his family. How he, a Christian writer and thinker, and his wife, a scientist who spends her days in a lab, navigate the gifts and limits of technology in their home. And the dominate image he works with is a tidying up game his family would play when his kids were young. They would set a timer for 10 minutes and play what he calls a "demented version of musical chairs" where they would rush about putting everything back in its proper place. Every stuffie. Every book. Every shoe. Every pencil crayon. At the end of the 10 minute whirl-wind of activity, order would be restored, that part of the house tidy.

Andy applies this to our need to place technology in its proper place. If left unchecked, the technology that saturates our lives and shapes our world can create quite the mess. In our lives. In our homes. In our relationships. Andy writes,

Technology is in its proper place when it helps us bond with the real people we have been given to love. It's out of its proper place when we end up bonding with people at a distance, like celebrities, whom we never meet.

Technology is in its proper place when it starts great conversations. It's out of its proper place when it prevents us from talking with and listening to one another.

Technology is in its proper place when it helps us take care of the fragile bodies we inhabit. It's out of its proper place when it promises to help us escape the limits and vulnerabilities of those bodies together.

Technology is in its proper place when it helps us cultivate awe for the created world we are a part of and responsible for stewarding. It's out of its proper place when it keeps us from engaging the wild and wonderful natural world with all our senses.³

Wisdom, here in Job 28, is to be found in the process of establishing the boundaries and limits of the technology in our lives.

Just like a family tidying up their house and placing things back in their proper place.

³ Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*, p. 20-21.

Just like our God in the act of creation ordering and limited the darkness so that light can appear, ordering and limiting the waters so that land can emerge. Ordering and remaking the world.

Following God's example, as imager bearers of God, we pursue wisdom through the ordering and remaking the world around us - placing everything in its proper place and right purpose. Which is a process of discernment and wondering and questioning, rather than a simple unthinking 'yes' or 'no' to some new technology or scientific advancement.

The poet here in Job offers the last words of his poem as a kind of guiding principle for this process of discernment:

The fear of the Lord - that is wisdom,
and to shun evil is understanding.

The Contemporary Testimony end in a similar way with the encouragement to approach each new discovery "with careful thought, seeking the will of God."

As God's people in the world, we're not called to unthinkingly reject the technology that shapes and forms the world around us. We're also not called to unthinkingly accept the technology that shapes and forms the world around us.

As God's people in the world, we're called to actively participate in the process of developing and discerning the proper place of our tech in our lives and the world around us. Seeking God's will in an incredibly complex world and pursuing that which brings glory to God and life to those around us.

Whether you're an engineer or lab technician, virologist or coder, or just someone trying to figure out how much is too much screen time or just what the role of social media should be in our our lives, the same Holy Spirit that hovered over the waters of creation when God ordered and made the world, is at work in our efforts of ordering and reordering, shaping and making, creating and testing the limits and purposes of the technology around us.

So as we emerge from this long season of living through our tech and screens, may the Spirit make us wise through this process, helping us to shun evil, pursue the good, and gain understanding, as we tidy up and remake the world around us.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let us pray...