

Voices: My struggle with neo-Luddism

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It all seemed to start when the battery to my cell phone went on the fritz last year for no apparent reason. Then I made a trip to Dallas and lost cell coverage. Then I came home, and the phone started mysteriously dropping calls. Then my tablet, a gift from a gracious church member, began to balk at Wi-Fi connections, and the screen changed colors after I accidentally dropped it.



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Then it dawned on me: I've had these so-called smart devices nearly four years. With the Lord, a day is as a thousand years. With a digital device, a day is as a million. In fact, I even drew a laugh from a salesperson at the phone store who looked at me with wonder and proclaimed, "Your phone is ancient!"

Thus began a struggle with Neo-Luddism.

"Technophobic leanings"

Neo-Luddism is a term used for people who are becoming increasingly

skeptical of technological progress. The omniscient Wikipedia declares Neo-Luddism is a derogatory term “used for people showing technophobic leanings.”

I have never thought of myself as technophobic, but perhaps I am beginning to lean that direction. Granted, some of the leaning is purely defensive. I have been the victim of some inglorious and immensely irritating rants on Facebook and Twitter in past years. One person even tried to steal my identity on social media. I also desire to protect my children from some of the abusive behavior we find even in the comment sections of news stories.

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Let’s remember Jesus said, “Out of the heart the mouth speaks.” Sometimes, I wish he would have said, “From the thumbs the heart tweets.”

Yet some of the Neo-Luddism also is an attempt to become more purposefully disciplined. Some of us can become seriously and negatively addicted to our smart devices, which may lead to dumbed-down living.

For instance, I have just about decided against using PowerPoint during preaching anymore, attempting now to paint more word pictures through narratives and metaphors. It turns out the Bible is full of pictures and good stories if we have eyes to see them.

I also have tried to become more intentional about speaking to someone via phone or in person instead of emails. Communication is difficult enough without any mechanism to translate word inflections or emojis. I also have started to turn off my phone most weekends. Email is only read during office hours. And I deleted all personal social media accounts.

Simplicity & sanity

You would not believe how these simple actions have helped me retain a modicum of sanity. I even toyed with the idea of getting one of those old-fashioned flip phones, which would be a great conversation piece with young people in my congregation.

Our church recently got in on the act, too. We committed the majority of a week last fall to a plan called “Simplify For Him.” The idea was for the church to enjoy the spiritual discipline of simplicity for a period of time during one of the busiest eras of the year in West Texas—football season. We committed to pray and worship together nightly from Sunday through Wednesday. We figured if the church in Acts could gather together for worship daily, then we could sacrifice a week.

All of this to say Neo-Luddism may not be all that bad after all. A bit of tamed skepticism applied to technological progress can save the church from divisive pitfalls. So, before we send the next text message, jump on social networking during a long line at the grocery store, and certainly before we think about tweeting during our commute, let’s consider what it means to be content in all circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13).

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