

Being a Pre-Modern: A Guide to Protecting and Blessing Our Homes

Terms and Definitions

You might have noticed the term “pre-modern” in the title. What does this mean? I mean that which is *before*...before modernity, before the assertion that the “autonomous individual” is the measure of all things. Before the loss of wonder in the transcendent and miraculous. Before the industrial age and scientism displaced a general belief in God. I also mean a rejection of the radical ideas of post-modernity, in particular, the need to express whatever wells up inside as the only form of truth, relativized as it is. A “pre-modern” rejects that view, all while acknowledging it is the very air we breathe. Positively, the pre-modern confesses Christ as the center of all existence, and the family as the concrete expression and building block of every society. The pre-modern seeks to reclaim what has been obscured by engaging in person-to-person conversation, the wonder of God’s creation, and making the home a place of holiness.

As for the term “technology,” I don’t seek to debate what it is and isn’t. My focus is on the intrusion of screens and the internet into our home life. My presupposition: those forms of “technology” are not neutral and to be regarded as potential threats. Therefore, I use the word “tech” to stand in for my target. In other words, when I say “tech,” I’m not talking toothbrushes.

The Pitfalls and Dangers of Tech

I begin with a few basic “first article” issues related to tech, applicable to most any home and family, reflected in numerous studies. These studies show severe behavioral and neurological consequences in the early adoption of tech, prolonged screen exposure, and endless engagement with algorithms. Tech’s ultimate end is to isolate and separate—not from the tech, but from each other. The tech industry’s term is “the removal of friction,” as in the removal of self-restraint and parents from children! The worst case scenario is full-blown tech addiction, entailing a constant dopamine release, an endless chasing of rewards, and an arousal center on hyperdrive, artificially stimulated. While it’s common to complain about tech use, most fail to do anything about it. While most families know something is off in the home, most fail to address the factor driving it: out-of-control tech use. This is enflamed by worship of society’s tri-partite idols: comfort, convenience, and expediency. We’ve been habituated, or habituated ourselves into “wanting things now,” and “wanting things often.” The emphasis on immediacy, which tech endlessly supplies.

When I say tech is not neutral, I mean it manipulates us into the very act of using it. Tech obliterates self-control by providing an amplification of feedback, what tech writers call “juice.” Endless juice alters patterns of perception in imperceptible ways, until all sense of resistance is gone. Even our brain chemistry and neuroplasticity, created for our good, are hi-jacked by tech. Our brains have been rewired right under our noses—literally.

It's easy to be long on the problem, so I leave that to others. Good resources are available. Here, though, as a focus, are a few statistics on the role of tech in pornography use:

- ❖ Forty seven percent of U.S. families report pornography as a problem.
- ❖ The average of age of first exposure is eleven years old; Ninety four percent of children will see pornography before the age of fourteen.
- ❖ Seventy six percent of young Christian adults actively search for pornography.

Ask yourself: how does an eleven year old have access to pornography? Do not despair though...this article's purpose is not only to admonish, but to encourage into finding another way. A way of "opting out" and "slowing down." A pathway to flourishing rather than floundering. I propose we make better choices, ask better questions, adopt better practices. We ask not "What do I want my child to do when she grows up?" but "what do I want my child to fix her heart upon for a lifetime?" Who do I want them *to be*?

Solution One: The Family Table

I say it every time I address these topics: prepare to be underwhelmed. "Is this all?" We are underwhelmed because deep down we have an inkling of the solutions. They're within our grasp. We want something better, but don't have a plan to start. The better starts with the family table. It is a foundational sociological fact: *families that eat together thrive*. But we've abandoned this practice. I ask: how many times a week does your family have dinner together? Six? Two? Never? Why? Too busy? Different schedules? Different preferences? A pre-modern family eats together, without the intrusion of tech. For a family that eats together, talks. A family that talks, prays together. A family that eats, talks, and prays together, worships together. But how often does the busyness of life—school activities, social events, sports—get in the way of simply sitting down together to share a meal? If you have children at home of any age, how many times a week are you eating at the same time, at the same table? If it's less than five, then better decisions need to be made.

Related to this is table fellowship. Following Arthur Just from Concordia Theological Seminary, meals for our Lord Jesus were places where His mission and message were expressed. The hallmarks of Jesus' table fellowship were the sharing of His presence, His teaching, and the binding of His community through ritual. In the beginning of Acts, before His ascension, Jesus gives final instructions throughout forty days, while "being close together" with His apostles. Peter amplifies this in Acts 10:41, saying their mission was given as they "ate and drank with Jesus after He was raised from the dead." The point: Jesus offers Himself in profound and intimate ways at the table. So, following our Lord, what are the hallmarks for our "table fellowship"?

A sharing of presence/incarnational
Talking leading to teaching/catechetical
The ritual act of a meal binding people together/liturgical

Table fellowship is being together. It provides the opportunity for conversation, the springboard for teaching. And there is a liturgical component to the family table, that is, it employs rituals. Rituals, or sharing ceremonies, bind people together toward a common goal. The family table strengthens the family, and is an opportunity for the father to lead the family in devotion, prayer, and even singing. It's the locale where the family gathers away from tech and with each other, that profound and intimate things may happen.

It should go without saying that the family table is tech-free; for it is communal and conversational. This, however, requires work—purposeful planning, shopping, cooking, setting the table. It requires cleaning and washing. This isn't a “snap-your-fingers” fix! But it is the place to start in order to regain sanity for families. The family table provides order to the day and to the home. It combats individualized schedules and an “opt-in” approach to saying “yes” to every single thing. If we could encourage our families to eat together, it would drastically change the home-lives of every family. The possibilities are endless. And tech-less.

Solution Two: The Less-Tech Home

Or at least, there should be less tech. First, we are to purge the “old leaven” out of our midst. This demands an honest and thorough assessment of how much tech we daily engage in ourselves. Are there things we casually watch or listen to without thinking? Be aware. What kinds of things draw our hearts away from Jesus? What about our children and grandchildren's access? Be discerning. Making an honest assessment, we then can make better choices. To condemn all technology as bad gets us nowhere. But we must face the quandary: how do faithful Christians navigate smart phones and the internet? Prudence is needed. Wise to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. Prudence, though, needs practices. What are practical things, then, we can do in the home to navigate tech use?

I give you a catch phrase: *chase the slow*. There's absolutely no reason a child should have a smart phone. No reason a child should have an Apple ID. No reason any child under eight should be anywhere near a screen. The research on this is definitive. Screens retard development of the pre-frontal cortex (not fully developed until twenty-five) and the nervous system. So, chase the slow. Delay tech for your children. To quote John Cougar, “changes come around real soon; make us women and men.” There will come a time for tech. One of the biggest fallacies going is: if we don't get kids in tech early, they'll be behind. Nope. They'll be fine. Instead, teach kids about God's beauty. Teach them to have conversations. To think. To read deeply. To memorize. To recite. Catechize them. Besides, tech is so “user friendly” it takes an eighteen year old about forty seconds to learn to use a smartphone...if they even choose to get one. Several alternatives are available.

Chase the slow can be implemented in concrete ways. Tech should be in community spaces. No bedrooms, bathrooms, basements. No private, dark, out of the way rooms. We have one TV in the home, and it's in the family room. Create "off-limit" areas for your tech. This includes you! Get that phone out of the bedroom. Some families have a basket all phones go into when not in use. Others "park" their tech in a designated space. Research shows just *the presence* of a phone in the same room (even put away in a drawer) greatly affects one's attention span. So, put them away until needed. Chase the slow.

Practical. Avoid going "mobile." I know everyone loves their iPads and laptops. Consider an old-fashioned desk top instead, in an office with open doors. When it's in use, it's done in public. When finished, it is shut down. Give your family a sabbath from the constant disruption of tech. If your family has a game system, this should also be in a public space, like a family room. Fixed places, with open areas, strictly monitored. Chase the slow.

Practical. As a general approach, parents tend to permit, then limit when it comes to tech. This is backwards. We should not allow, then restrict, then permit with limitations until absolutely needed...after training. We used to understand that one would never hand over a dangerous tool, like a power saw, to a child. In fact, that's a good analogy—giving a kid a phone is like giving them a power tool. The average age a child gets a smart phone is twelve (though getting younger every day). Most often, it's given with no training and little discernment. Oh sure, there's "rules" (no texting after 9pm; only an hour after school)...we should do a better job of training our children with a dangerous piece of technology that gives direct access to everything. While not prescribing an exact age, it sure ain't twelve. Chase the slow.

Again, smart phones aren't neutral, but potential windows into every manner of debauchery, carefully designed to illicit increasing usage. They are tools that draw people into another universe. Very often, that universe is dark and dangerous. This means that parents are to be the gatekeeper. A gatekeeper restricts, then permits after careful scrutiny. "Who goes there? State your business!" Positively, gatekeepers have the wonderful privilege to introduce beauty into the sphere of the home. Gatekeepers set the standard. But as gatekeeper, it also means your standards are to be high. This also applies to social media. Do our children have to be on Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok? Do we even ask, "What is an appropriate age to allow my child to be on these platforms?" Again, most parents, showing little discernment, permit, then try to limit. That way they feel as if they're not depriving but still parenting. But a part of parenting by its very essence is to restrict. Especially from things potentially harmful. Chase the slow.

Technology can be used for noble purposes. God is the creator of all things. Technology is a creation of God. Families can employ tech to protect those in the home from stumbling upon what is evil and avoid temptation. Content blocking software systems help from encountering unwelcome intrusions. But there's an old saying in Alcoholics Anonymous—*if you don't want a haircut, don't hang out in a barber shop*. While completely staying off the internet may not be feasible, limiting time on it is good. So, tech restrictors are necessary. However, they in no way

take the place of good parenting practices. All restrictors can be gotten around. They're simply a good first line of defense—like installing a security system in your house. They give a measure of protection and some peace of mind. But they also can give people a false sense of security.

Does this mean no “family movie nights”? No Spotify playing through the speaker system? Does this mean you give up all tech? No...but it does mean that we don't fight “technology with technology.” Instead, we create common family spaces. Places in the home where phones are put away when the family is gathered. We might even consider going back to a land line. For we are to be conscious and intentional about our time together.

Solution Three: Pre-Modern Parenting

I write to Christians. So, we extend grace and practice forgiveness, received only from Jesus. We are sinners and make mistakes. But this means we seek to learn and grow in repentance and faith. So, we are also to stay informed of threats and challenges. This is living out our active righteousness in our various vocations. We plan strategic responses and protect our children by having age-appropriate conversations at every stage of life. We respect their innocence by not flaunting the world at them. We recognize that little eyes and ears aren't ready for everything all at once. The flip side though is—if we aren't the first to introduce a difficult topic, we may as well be the last. So, we monitor everything and act accordingly. We train, pray, study, worship, talk; we fail, then try something better. We start with Jesus and end with Jesus. We use what He has given us—His Word, His sanctified wisdom—to do what we are supposed to do. In other words, we parent as a pre-modern.

Is this a return to a proto-technological age? Not necessarily. But we don't measure our family life by the standards of our contemporaries. We hold ourselves only to what is good, true, and beautiful. That's our standard—God and His design and everything that *that* entails. We're not concerned with trends (though we employ what's helpful). We're not concerned with parenting advice from peers (though we employ what is wise). We do not seek the approval from anyone other than our Lord. We adopt the posture of not caring what others think about us outside of the Church. Easily said, but done with great difficulty. It's true...we live in a post-modern, post-Christian society. We need to understand how to operate within it, but we don't parent in a vacuum of morality. Quite the opposite. Chase the slow. We actually consider a time “before.” Before smart homes; before every purchase was data-mined and marketed back to us. We parent in timeless ways according to timeless truths rooted in God's will. What does this look like?

A pre-modern home is adorned with beauty. It has “quiet places” and “quiet time.” It's filled with abundant and imaginative play. Without screens. Where nature intrudes as constant reminders of God's good creation. A home filled with music. Not cacophonous, guttural, crunchy, abrasive noises, but music that's melodic, rhythmic, dynamic, ascendent. A home where screen time is carefully managed and scrupulously limited. For everyone. A home where most meals are eaten at a table facing your family. Where mom and dad are present. Without headphones or earbuds. A home with chatter and filled with laughter. Where fairy tales are told

and books are read out loud, and great books re-read again and again. Where naps are had on Sundays. A home where things are built, repaired, and if possible, repurposed. Where children draw, and play, and run.

Yes, run. For children play outside in a pre-modern home. A lot. It's a home where fieldtrips are taken not for "school," but for genuine learning. Where trees are climbed and creeks are "creeked." Where families walk together and breathe the fresh air. Where birds are identified by sight and sound. Where neighbors are greeted by name. Maybe this portrait aggravates you because you see it as an impossibility. Hopelessly idealistic. But shouldn't we aspire to something better? Isn't settling for expediency what has gotten us into our present tech trap?

Perhaps we can talk about what a pre-modern is *not*. A pre-modern home is not focused solely on the self. The very root of sin is to be "curved in." To naval gaze. The founding of our great country, which has given us so many blessings from our Creator, is based on Enlightenment ideals. While we prize God's endowed creaturely gifts, enshrined in our founding documents, the individual self is not the center of the universe. God is the center of life, and the home. We are completely "given to" by our Creator. This is starting to sound philosophical. Turns out the concrete needs the transcendent to aspire to and copy. Again, I address the redeemed in Christ, who are concerned for our families. At some point, we must assess how we're doing, then try to do better. A project of the pre-modern is to improve what's been given with the goal of better stewardship of it. It is a never-ending project. Within this project though, is so much freedom to use God's gifts in the home. A lot of "space" for talents, tastes, and inclinations. But we are to resist the "choice-at-all-cost" lifestyle. For the modern home is enslaved to choice, choosing all the wrong things. So, the pre-modern parent makes choices, endlessly it seems, but ones that prioritize the family in order to preserve their home life. This, in turn, gives us terrific freedom using God's good gifts by living within the boundaries He sets.

~~Maybe~~ Maybe you'd like to make changes, but are overwhelmed by where to start. Maybe you're doing some things suggested but don't see the possibility of doing more. The basic question we must all ask—what is our greatest hope for our children? If the answer is that they are life-long, active, eternal participants in the Kingdom of God, then tough choices are to be made. It's not too late, though, it's never too late. You start small. Try to eat dinner together *a couple* of nights a week. Have a special family prayer time once a week. Invite dad to read the Bible at devotion. Maybe we can adjust our priorities and say "no" to doing everything everyone else does. Turns out "no" is a complete sentence.

Here's the whole point—we are mandated as parents, as Christians, to abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good. We are called to holiness. This means we are to live according to God's expectations and not the neighbors'. Our goal is to promote human flourishing centered on Christ, derived by the Spirit. We're to parent in "timeless" ways...not that we can escape our crooked generation; but we are to be more faithful than Lot, who left the sanctuary of his home and tried to negotiate with the spirit of the age...who ultimately had to be dragged away from

Sodom. So, our tech habits are to be faithful to God, flowing out of practices oriented around His truth, goodness, and beauty. We commend our families to God, Who is in control. We pray. And...as the old saying goes, we pray for water...then we dig a well.